CHRONICLE OF THE STRUGGLE FOR SANITY

Braden Watson

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This book is a work of fiction based on real events. Any resemblance to actual persons, events, or organizations is purely coincidental.

Prologue

The silence in the office was thick, almost palpable. It smelled of old paper, cheap instant coffee, and dust gathering on files that no one had opened in years. Outside the window, the gray Tomsk evening slowly flowed into night, blurring the outlines of trees and turning passersby into faceless shadows. But here, under the light of a fluorescent lamp, shadows had no right to exist. A new reality was being created here.

The man at the table did not resemble a villain from the movies. No scars, no sinister laughter, no expensive suits. A worn jacket, thin-rimmed glasses, the tired look of a civil servant dreaming of vacation. In front of him lay a document. Several sheets of printed text, held together with a paper clip. Ordinary paper, standard Times New Roman font, size 12.

Next to it lay a book. A bright cover with an image of a chariot and two figures engaged in dialogue in the middle of a battlefield. "The Bhagavad Gita as It Is." An ancient text that had survived empires, wars, revolutions, and the changing of civilizations. A text read by Gandhi and Tolstoy, Einstein and Hesse. A text that for thousands of years had served as a consolation to millions of souls seeking answers to eternal questions.

The man at the table had not read this book. He did not need to. His task was not to seek the truth, but to complete a technical assignment. They brought him quotes. Taken out of context, stripped

of meaning, dissected like frogs on a biologist's table. They explained to him what he needed to find. And he found it.

He picked up a pen. An ordinary ballpoint pen with a blue refill.

At that moment, thousands of kilometers away, in a small apartment, a mother was putting her child to bed, singing a quiet prayer. In a temple on the other side of town, a monk was mopping the floor, preparing for the morning service. In distant India, pilgrims were entering the waters of the Ganges, whispering sacred verses. None of them knew that their fate was being decided right now, in this stuffy office, with a simple stroke of the pen.

The man signed the document.

The signature was illegible, quick, habitual. Just a squiggle. But that stroke weighed more than lead bullets. It turned ancient wisdom into "extremist material." It made faith a crime. It gave the command to the huge state machine, ready to grind down destinies without asking questions.

This document was called "Comprehensive Psychological and Linguistic Expert Opinion." It sounded scientific. It sounded authoritative. It sounded like a sentence that could not be appealed.

No one thought about the consequences at that moment. No one saw the threads stretching from that table to Moscow, to the offices of an organization with the inconspicuous acronym RACIRS, to the offices of people who had made hatred their profession. No one knew that this act would trigger an international scandal that would make diplomats blush and lawyers clutch their heads in despair.

It was the beginning. Not just of a trial. It was the launch of a mechanism. A mechanism that had been fine-tuned for years, lubricated with lies and fueled by fear. A mechanism designed to prove that black is white, that peace is war, and that faith in God is a threat to national security.

The man put down his pen and rubbed his nose. The deed was done. Tomorrow the paper would go to the prosecutor's office. Tomorrow the hunt would begin.

He turned off the light and left the office, leaving the book and the verdict lying nearby. In the darkness, they seemed equal in weight. But that was an illusion. The paper, signed by a hand that knew no doubt, had already begun to fill with a weight capable of crushing the concrete walls of justice.

The story we are about to tell did not begin with gunshots or high-profile arrests. It began with silence and a signature. With a bureaucratic procedure that concealed an abyss.

Welcome to the world of expert terror.

Chapter 1: An Ordinary Day

Tomsk at five in the morning is a special state of matter. The city, squeezed between the taiga and the river, seems extinct at this time of day, immersed in a thick, cotton-like silence, broken only by the rare crunch of snow under the wheels of a patrol car or the distant rumble of a train. The darkness here in winter is dense, palpable, reluctant to retreat, clinging to the carved window frames of old wooden houses and the concrete boxes of residential areas.

In one of these typical prefabricated high-rise buildings on the outskirts, in an apartment on the seventh floor, a dim night light came on. Dmitry, a forty-year-old design engineer, carefully climbed out from under the blanket, trying not to wake his wife. The floorboards in the hallway creaked as usual, but no one stirred. His two school-age sons were sleeping in the next room. An ordinary family, an ordinary morning, an ordinary life, scheduled down to the minute: wake up, breakfast, school, work, homework, sleep.

Dmitry went to the kitchen, washed his face with cold water, and shook off the last traces of sleep. His face in the mirror was the face of a man who works a lot and rests little: wrinkles around his eyes, slight gray hair at his temples. He did not look like a fanatic, a hermit, or a man who rejects the world. On the contrary, his work required extreme concentration and rationalism. He designed load-bearing structures for industrial facilities. A mistake in his calculations could cost people their lives and the customer millions

of rubles. His world was ruled by structural mechanics, GOST standards, and rigid logic.

But that was precisely why he needed those morning hours so much.

He sat down on a small rug in the corner of the room, which his family jokingly called "Dad's office." He held a rosary in his hands — one hundred and eight beads made of sacred tulasi wood, polished to a shine by his fingers. Dmitry closed his eyes.

For Dmitry, this was not an escape from reality. On the contrary, it was a way of adjusting his perspective. Just as a musician tunes his instrument before a concert, he tuned his consciousness before going out into the aggressive environment of the big city. Meditation gave him what he so desperately lacked in the hustle and bustle of deadlines and endless meetings — inner peace. A point of support.

Next to him, on a low nightstand, lay a book. The Bhagavad Gita As It Is. It had a bright cover with a picture of a chariot. The book was old, with worn corners and lots of bookmarks. Dmitry opened it at random. The text, written thousands of years ago in Sanskrit and translated into Russian, spoke of things that seemed surprisingly relevant to a 21st-century engineer from Siberia. About duty. About the need to do one's work honestly, without becoming attached to the fruits of one's labor. About how anger is born of unfulfilled desire and destroys the mind.

Dmitry reread the commentary. The lines soothed his soul like a calming balm. Yesterday, at the planning meeting, the boss yelled at the department because the suppliers had missed their deadlines. Dmitry had barely managed to restrain himself from responding

sharply. Now, in the morning silence, he understood: the boss's anger was his problem, his fear. Dmitry's job was simply to recalculate the load on the beam so that the building would stand.

"Do your duty, but don't consider yourself the cause of the results," he repeated to himself. It was a philosophy of common sense. It did not call for burning bridges or hating those of other faiths. It taught him to be calm when there was a storm around him. It taught him to see a particle of the divine in every living creature.

By seven in the morning, the apartment had come to life. The kettle whistled, doors slammed. Dmitry's wife, Elena, a music teacher at the local art school, was preparing breakfast. Oatmeal with fruit and herbal tea appeared on the table.

"Have you seen the forecast?" Elena asked as she sliced apples.

"They're promising minus thirty by evening."

"The car should start, the battery is new," Dmitry replied, finishing his tea.

"Do the boys have practice today?"

"Yes, the older one has sambo, and I'll pick up the younger one after art school."

An ordinary conversation. Ordinary concerns. A mortgage that still has five years to pay off. The need to buy winter tires. Plans for the summer—maybe a trip to Altai, or if they get a bonus, to the sea.

They didn't know that their "ordinariness" would soon become the subject of a court case. That their books and their morning prayers

would be scrutinized by people who had never opened the Bhagavad Gita but had already decided that it was dangerous.

On the other side of town, in the dormitory of Tomsk State University, Andrei woke up. He was a third-year student in the history department. His room was in creative disarray: stacks of books, printouts of articles, a half-finished mug of coffee. On the wall hung a poster of a rock band and a small image of Krishna playing the flute.

Andrei came to faith through intellectual inquiry. He was looking for answers that textbooks on political science and sociology could not provide. Why do civilizations collapse? What is the meaning of human life if it ends in death anyway? He read mountains of literature, from the existentialists to the Russian classics. And then one day, at a street bookstall, he came across the Gita.

He opened it with the skepticism of a young intellectual. But the logic of the text struck him. It was not just a religion. It was a science of consciousness. A coherent, well-argued system explaining the structure of the universe and man's place in it.

Today was a difficult day for Andrei. He had a seminar on medieval history where he had to defend his thesis, and a part-time job as a courier in the evening. He put on his headphones, turned on a lecture by a spiritual teacher, and went out into the street.

Tomsk is a city of students and professors. Here, among ancient universities and scientific institutes, freedom of thought has always been valued. The libraries of Tomsk State University housed rare manuscripts, and the departments were filled with debates about the

fate of Russia and the world. It seemed unthinkable that here, in the "Siberian Athens," a process reminiscent of the medieval Inquisition could begin.

Andrei walked along Lenin Avenue, past the majestic building of the university's main campus. He felt like he was part of this world. He was a citizen of his country, a patriot, a future historian. The Bhagavad Gita did not make him a stranger. On the contrary, it helped him to understand Russian culture more deeply. Didn't Tolstoy seek the same truths? Didn't Dostoevsky agonize over the same questions about the soul and God?

For Andrei, as for Dmitri, faith was an inner core. It did not require political slogans. The Krishnaites of Tomsk did not attend rallies, did not demand a change of power, did not write angry petitions. They baked cookies to distribute to people on the streets (the famous "Food for Life" program), cleaned up trash in parks on Saturdays, and helped in nursing homes.

Their "extremism" consisted of not drinking alcohol, not smoking, and believing that the soul is eternal. In the eyes of a system accustomed to controlling minds through fear and vice, such independence looked suspicious. But for now, this suspicion lay dormant in folders marked "For official use only."

Dmitry's working day was intense. Urgent corrections to drawings, approval of estimates, a long conversation with the foreman, who was trying to replace high-quality concrete with cheaper stuff. Dmitry stood his ground firmly but calmly.

"Sergeich, why are you being so stubborn?" the foreman fumed.

"No one will find out!"

"I'll know," Dmitry replied calmly. "And you'll know. And when the ceiling cracks, the prosecutor will know. We're doing it according to the plan."

His colleagues respected him for his principled stance. Some knew that he was "in the know," while others simply considered him an oddball who didn't join the guys in the smoking room to tell jokes. But no one ever saw him as a threat.

During lunch break, Dmitry took out a container of homemade rice and vegetable stew.

"Fasting again?" his office neighbor asked good-naturedly, chewing on a sausage sandwich.

"Something like that," Dmitry smiled. "Lightness in the body, clarity in the mind."

"You're lucky. I get heartburn from these cafeteria cutlets. Maybe I should take up yoga too?"

They laughed. It was just casual, relaxed chatter. In this office, as in the whole city, people of different views coexisted peacefully. Orthodox Christians, atheists, Muslims, agnostics — they were all first and foremost people, neighbors, colleagues. The social fabric of the city seemed strong. No one imagined that soon someone would decide to tear this fabric apart, artificially dividing people into "us" and "them," into "traditional" and "sectarian."

In the evening, on his way home, Dmitry stopped by the temple. It was a small private house converted for the needs of the community.

No golden domes or minarets — just a sturdy brick building behind a high fence. Inside, it smelled of incense and fresh pastries.

A wide variety of people gathered here. An elderly woman in a down scarf, a businessman in an expensive coat, a group of students with guitars, a young mother with a child. They all took off their shoes at the entrance, leaving the street dirt and social masks behind the threshold.

An evening service was taking place in the altar room. Music played —a mridanga (clay drum) set the rhythm, karatals (small cymbals) rang in time. People sang mantras. Their faces were bright and relaxed. Here, they did not discuss politics, exchange rates, or gossip. Here, they talked about the eternal.

Dmitry stood in the back row, closed his eyes, and let the sound wash over him. The fatigue of the working day faded away. What remained was a feeling of deep, resounding gratitude. For this day, for his family, for the opportunity to simply stand here and sing.

The Bhagavad-gita taught that the material world is a place of duality. Happiness and sorrow, heat and cold, honor and dishonor follow one another like winter and summer. A wise man should not be troubled by this. But human nature is such that we always hope for the best. Standing in the warm, cozy hall, Dmitry believed that his life and the life of his community were flowing in the right direction. That they were not bothering anyone. That the state of which he was a citizen would protect his right to believe as his heart dictated.

He did not know that the mechanism had already been set in motion.

That somewhere in offices far removed from spirituality, papers with his name on them were already lying around. That "experts" with no education in religious studies or philology were already leafing through the pages of the very book that gave him the strength to live, searching for words that could be twisted and presented as weapons.

After the service, the chairman of the community, a smiling man with a soft voice, approached Dmitry.

"How's work, Dima?"

"Thank God, we're getting by. The project will be completed in a month."

"That's good. We'll need help repairing the porch in the spring. Could you take a look at it as an expert?"

"Of course. I'll come by on Saturday and take some measurements."

Everything was so ordinary. So peaceful.

Dmitry left the church on a frosty night. The snow crunched loudly under his boots. The air was sharp and icy. He got into his car, started the engine, and waited a few minutes for the interior to warm up.

On the passenger seat lay the Bhagavad-gita, which he always carried with him. In the light of the street lamp, the golden letters on the cover glowed dimly. The book looked so defenseless. Just paper, cardboard, ink. It couldn't stand up for itself. It couldn't hire a lawyer or give interviews. It could only speak to those who were willing to listen.

Dmitry turned on the radio. The local news babbled about milk yields, preparations for the heating season, some ice sculpture festival. Not a word about what was coming.

He pulled away, merging into the stream of traffic. The red brake lights ahead seemed like an endless river. The city went about its business, unaware that it would soon become the arena for an absurd battle. A battle in which common sense would clash with bureaucratic madness.

As he approached his house, Dmitry noticed something strange. A car was parked at the entrance—a dark, tinted Lada with no license plates. Two people were sitting inside. They didn't get out, just sat there with the engine off. Dmitry walked past, feeling someone's attentive, cold gaze on his back.

He turned around at the entrance door. The car stood motionless, like a predator lying in wait.

"It was just my imagination," he thought, dialing the intercom code. "I'm just tired. My nerves."

He took the elevator up, entered his warm apartment, which smelled of vanilla and baby shampoo. He hugged his wife and ruffled his sons' hair. His fear receded, dissolving into the comfort of home.

But that night, Dmitry had a dream. He dreamed that he was standing in the middle of a huge field, and instead of snow, black sheets of paper with printed text were falling from the sky. They fell thicker and thicker, covering the ground, houses, and people. He tried to open his Gita to read a protective mantra, but the pages of

the book suddenly turned white. The letters disappeared. The words faded away, leaving only emptiness.

He woke up in a cold sweat. The clock showed 3:30 a.m. A blizzard howled outside the window. The city slept, covered in snow like a white shroud. But it was no longer the peaceful sleep of the day before. There was tension in the air, thin as a stretched string, ready to snap at any moment.

The silence was over. Noise was approaching.

Chapter 2: Shadows on the Walls

The morning began not with coffee or the usual mantra, but with a phone call. The sound rang out sharply in the silence of the apartment, like an alarm. Dmitry, who had just gotten out of the shower, picked up the phone. It was a colleague with whom they usually discussed only drawings and deadlines for projects.

"Dima, have you seen today's newspaper?" The voice on the line sounded strange. It was a mixture of curiosity, awkwardness, and some kind of disgusted wariness. "No, I read the news on the internet. What's in it? Have they raised utility rates again?" "No... It's about you. About your..." His colleague paused, searching for the right word. "Anyway, buy the Tomsky Vestnik. It's on page three."

Dmitry hung up. A bad feeling stirred inside him — the kind you get before a storm, when the air becomes heavy and electrified. He went down to the kiosk at the bus stop.

The newspaper smelled of cheap printing ink and dampness. The headline immediately caught his eye, printed in bold, screaming letters: "CAUTION: TOTALITARIAN CULT RECRUITS OUR CHILDREN."

Dmitry scanned the text. With each line, his eyebrows crept upward and his heart began to beat slower and heavier. The article was a masterpiece of manipulation. It contained no facts, names, or dates. Instead, it was a set of trigger words that struck directly at the

subconscious: "brainwashing," "psychological abuse," "alien faith," "threat to national security."

But that wasn't the worst part. The author of the article, a certain "special correspondent," masterfully used a mechanism that psychologists call "guilt by association." One paragraph mentioned peaceful Krishnaites distributing food to the homeless, and the next, without any logical transition, talked about the gas attack in the Tokyo subway organized by the Aum Shinrikyo sect and the mass suicides in the jungles of Guyana.

The text was constructed in such a way that readers unaccustomed to critical analysis would form a stable neural connection: "Bhagavad Gita" equals "terrorism." A person in orange clothing equals a murderer. Vegetarianism equals preparation for suicide.

Dmitry stood in the middle of a snow-covered street, clutching the newspaper in his hand. People hurried past, wrapped in their collars. Ordinary passers-by. But now, after reading these lines, Dmitry felt an invisible but impenetrable wall growing between him and this stream of people.

It was the beginning of stigmatization. A process as old as the world itself, but no less effective for that.

At the university, Andrei felt the change in atmosphere almost physically. The usually noisy and democratic student cafeteria today seemed like a minefield. He sat down at his usual table with his classmates and took out his lunch box.

"Hi," he said, opening the lid. The conversation at the table froze for a second.

"Listen, Andrey," began the group leader, the guy with whom they had discussed Peter I's reforms just yesterday. "Is it true that you guys... well, drink blood? Or that you sign over your apartments to gurus?"

Andrei choked on his rice.

"Are you serious? You're a historian. You know what source verification is. Where did you get this nonsense?"

"Well, that's what they write..." The class president waved his hand vaguely toward the newspaper lying on the windowsill. The very same one. "And there was a story on TV yesterday. They said it was a destructive cult. That you brainwash people."

Andrei looked at his friends. He no longer saw Andrei, the straight-A student, rock and history lover, in their eyes. He saw how their perception of him was being replaced by a caricatured stereotype of a "cult member."

"This is called dehumanization," Andrei said quietly. "You're not looking at me right now. You're looking at a label."

"Come on, don't get so worked up," one of the guys said, embarrassed. "It's just kind of weird. What if it's true? There's no smoke without fire."

"There's no smoke without fire." This saying is a favorite weapon of information terrorism. It allows any lie to be justified. If it's written about, then there must be something to it. If someone is accused, then they must be guilty. The presumption of innocence, that pillar of law, collapses instantly under the onslaught of the printed word.

Andrei left the dining room without finishing his meal. He needed some air. He understood what was happening. He had read about it in textbooks. This is how the image of the enemy was created in Nazi Germany. First there were articles and cartoons. At first, Jews were simply called "alien elements," "usurers," "a threat to the German spirit." They didn't need to commit crimes — it was enough just *to exist*.

The method of "branding with yellow stars" has been transformed in the 21st century. Now there is no need to sew fabric onto clothing. It is enough to stick the word "sect" in the information field. This label works like an invisible brand. It signals to society: "This person is dangerous. He is not like us. His rights can be disregarded. His feelings are not important."

Andrei walked down the corridor, and it seemed to him that this invisible star was burning on his forehead. Glances that had previously been indifferent or friendly now seemed sharp. Someone whispered behind his back. Someone demonstratively moved aside.

The information virus launched by the article began its work. It did not affect bodies, but social connections. It destroyed trust, turning neighbors, colleagues, and friends into potential overseers.

That evening, people gathered at the community center, where the community had rented a lecture hall. Usually, the atmosphere here was one of joy and tranquility, but today the air was thick with anxiety.

"They showed our temple, and the voiceover talked about a threat to Russia's sovereignty!" an elderly woman exclaimed indignantly.

"How can this be? We were born here, we live here!"

"And at work, my boss asked me if I was going to blow up the office," a young programmer said with a bitter smile. "It seemed like a joke, but his eyes weren't laughing."

Dmitry took the floor. He tried to speak calmly, although inside he was boiling.

"Friends, this is a misunderstanding. The journalists just didn't get it. They want a sensation, 'juicy' facts. They took some clichés from the internet and cobbled together this libel. We have nothing to hide. We are open. We just need to invite them to visit us, show them how we live, what we do. When they see that we are normal people, they will write a retraction.

The audience nodded. People tend to believe in the rationality of the world. It seemed impossible to them that in a democratic state, where the Constitution guarantees freedom of conscience, a targeted campaign of harassment could be launched without any grounds. They thought it was a mistake. The stupidity of a single editor.

What was happening was no accident. It was classic preparation of public opinion. Before launching a legal attack, it was necessary to prepare the ground. It was necessary to ensure that when the trials and searches began, society would not be outraged, but would breathe a sigh of relief: "Finally, they've been brought to justice."

The articles used terms that had no legal meaning but carried a powerful emotional charge. "Totalitarian sect," "destructive cult" — these concepts do not exist in Russian legislation. But they are found in the manuals of those who incite hatred. These words function as

markers of "us versus them." They shut down logic and activate instincts. The instinct for self-preservation whispers to the average person: "Stay away. It's dangerous. It's contagious."

Elena, Dmitry's wife, sat in the corner of the hall, clutching her purse. She did not speak, but listened attentively. Today, when she entered the staff room, the conversations died down. The school principal, always a friendly woman, greeted her curtly, without looking her in the eye. And during recess, Elena heard one of the parents whisper to another: "We should check out that music teacher. They say they hypnotize the children there."

Elena knew she was a good teacher. Her students had won places in academic competitions. But now her professionalism, her experience, her love for children — all of this was being overshadowed by one dirty word thrown from the pages of a newspaper.

She felt defenseless. How do you prove that you're not a camel? How do you prove that you're not a zombie? Any excuse is taken as confirmation of guilt. "They deny it, so they must be hiding something." It was a vicious circle.

The days passed, and the tension grew. It wasn't an avalanche; it was more like a slow rise in water level. First, her feet got wet, then it became difficult to walk.

New materials appeared in the local media. The tone became increasingly aggressive. While the first articles still used words such as "presumably" and "according to experts," the authors now did not mince words. They used vocabulary associated with war and

pathology: "metastasis of the cult," "spiritual infection," "battle for minds."

The reader was led to believe that these people were sick and contagious. Or worse: these people were agents of hostile forces.

Dmitry tried to analyze the situation from an engineering point of view. "Look," he said to Andrei, laying out printouts of articles on the table. "The same phrases. Word for word. 'Threat to traditional values,' 'psychological dependence.' Different publications, different authors, but the text is identical. This can't be a coincidence. It's a temnik."

"A talking point?" Andrei asked.

"Instructions. Someone gave them talking points. Someone is coordinating this attack. It's not just a chase for ratings. It's a contract job."

Andrei nodded. He had also noticed this strange synchronicity. And one more detail: the complete absence of alternative opinions. Not a single journalist came to the church to interview the believers themselves. No one asked, "What do you think about these accusations?" They were judged in absentia. They were deprived of their right to speak in the public sphere.

It was an information vacuum into which the poisonous gas of lies was pumped.

The mechanism of "guilt by association" was particularly painful. In one television program, the video was edited so that footage of singing Krishnaites was followed by footage of militants with weapons, then footage of crying children (who had nothing to do

with the case), and then Dmitry's face again, filmed by a hidden camera on the street.

A voiceover said that "sects destroy families" and "deprive people of their free will." There was no direct accusation of terrorism against Dmitry — the TV channel's lawyers played it safe. But the editing did its job. The viewer saw Dmitry and terrorists in the same context. The subconscious mind equated the two.

"This is despicable," Elena whispered, staring at the screen. "How can they do this? We have children. What if they start bullying the boys at school?"

Dmitry hugged his wife. His hands were warm, but his eyes were cold and hard. He was beginning to understand that the time for "misunderstandings" was over. That their peaceful life, built on faith in goodness and justice, had collided with something cynical and ruthless.

The climax of the week came on Friday evening. Dmitry was returning home late. Approaching his building, he saw that the light bulb above the door was broken. The wall of the house glowed white in the darkness.

He turned on the flashlight on his phone and shone it on the wall.

There, on the gray concrete, one word was written in black paint. The letters were crooked and smudged, written in haste but with hatred.

"SECT."

And next to it was a symbol crossed out with a cross, vaguely resembling a swastika, but in mirror image.

Dmitry stood and stared at the inscription. This was no longer in the newspaper. It was here, on his house. The line between informational violence and reality had been blurred. The words sown in the media had sprouted on the streets.

Who did this? A neighbor's teenager who had read too many articles? Or someone sent specifically for this purpose? It didn't matter. What mattered was that his house was no longer a fortress. It had been marked. Like a plague barracks.

A neighbor was walking by with her dog. A woman they had greeted for ten years, who had treated his children to pies. She saw Dmitry, saw the inscription illuminated by a flashlight. Her dog wagged its tail happily, recognizing a familiar face. But the owner pulled on the leash.

She didn't say hello. She quickened her pace, averting her eyes, as if afraid of being infected just by being nearby. Dmitry didn't see hatred in her gaze, no. There was fear. An animalistic, irrational fear of someone the newspaper called a "stranger."

Dmitry turned off his flashlight. Darkness enveloped the courtyard again, but the inscription continued to burn in his mind.

He realized that this was only the beginning. The shadows on the walls began to come to life. Words turned into actions. The mechanism of stigmatization was running at full power, and it was already impossible to stop it with simple explanations or friendly smiles.

His phone vibrated in his pocket. Messages were coming in on the community chat. "They wrote nasty things on our gate." "They broke

the window of my car." "They threw threats into my mailbox."

This was happening all over the city. Synchronously. Coordinated.

Dmitry looked up at the sky. The stars were hidden by low clouds. The city slept, lulled by lies, confident that it was being protected from a terrible threat. The city did not know that the real threat was not the people with books, but those who put spray cans in the hands of vandals and hatred in the minds of ordinary people.

Dmitry opened the front door. He had to explain to his children why there was a bad word written on their house. And he had to prepare himself. He didn't yet know what exactly — for court, for arrest, for a pogrom? But he knew for sure: peacetime was over.

And somewhere in the offices where these articles were written and plans for "measures" were approved, people who considered themselves defenders of tradition were ticking boxes in reports. For them, it was just a job. Effective management of public consciousness. They did not see real people behind the numbers and terms. They did not feel the cold that chilled Dmitry to the bone in that dark courtyard.

But the cold was real. And it was getting stronger.

Chapter 3: The Language of Hostility

Words have weight. Sometimes the weight of a pen, sometimes the weight of a stone, and sometimes the weight of a lead bullet. But before the shot is fired, an atmosphere must be created in which the shot seems not a crime but a necessity.

March in Tomsk was gray and damp. The snow, which had recently been white and fluffy, had turned into a dirty mess, exposing the trash that had accumulated over the winter. In the same way, the illusion of security in which the community had lived was fading away. If the first articles in the newspapers had caused confusion and resentment, now the tone had changed. It had become dry, harsh, and legally precise.

Dmitry sat at the kitchen table, pushing aside his cold tea. In front of him lay a printed text from a local news portal. The headline no longer screamed. It stated: "The prosecutor's office will investigate the activities of a religious group for extremism."

The word "extremism" was jarring. It seemed foreign, like a shard of glass in a loaf of bread. Extremism is bearded men with machine guns in the mountains, explosions in the subway, hostage-taking. What does the Bhagavad-Gita have to do with it? What do vegetarian feasts and chanting mantras have to do with it?

But Dmitry, as an engineer accustomed to working with documentation, began to notice a pattern. In the text of the article, written in dry bureaucratic language, there were phrases that could not have come from the mind of an ordinary journalist.

"The formation of a negative image of traditional religions," "psychological violence," "incitement of religious hatred."

These were not just words. They were legal markers. Someone very knowledgeable, who knew the Criminal Code by heart, was laying these bricks in the foundation of a future indictment. The rhetoric had shifted from the realm of "like or dislike" to the realm of "legal or illegal."

The office of the investigator at the Center for Countering Extremism (Center E) was stuffy. The major sitting at the table was sorting through papers with the look of someone performing routine but necessary work.

The situation in the authorities was unique. Several years ago, after the reform of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the famous UBOPs — departments for combating organized crime — were disbanded. Operatives, accustomed to dealing with real gangsters, racketeers, and murderers, were faced with a choice: retire or retrain. Many moved to new structures — the "E" Centers.

But the nature of their work changed dramatically. If a gangster can be caught red-handed at the scene of a crime, how can an extremist be caught if he doesn't blow up bridges?

The major sighed. The nationalists they had fought in the early years were "gone" — some had been imprisoned, others had gone

underground. And the reports required results. The structure could not stand idle. It needed fuel.

There was a statement on the major's desk. It was written by a "vigilant citizen." The text of the statement was surprisingly smooth, full of references to laws and quotes taken out of context. An ordinary person doesn't write like that. An ordinary person writes: "They are noisy and dress strangely." Here it was written: "The literature of this organization contains statements that demean human dignity on the basis of religious beliefs."

The major did not know the subtleties of Eastern philosophy. For him, the Bhagavad-Gita was just a book with a bright cover. But he had instructions. And he had "advisers." People who came to the department and willingly explained where to look for enemies. They brought manuals, brochures, and ready-made wording for protocols.

"So, you're saying they claim their god is supreme?" the major asked the visitor sitting opposite him. The visitor was not a law enforcement officer. He was an unremarkable man in a gray suit who introduced himself as a "religious scholar and public figure."

"That's right," nodded the visitor. "And that, Comrade Major, is a statement of religious exclusivity. If their god is the truth, then the rest are lies? If this is presented publicly and in a form that humiliates people on the basis of their attitude to religion, then we can talk about Article 282. "Actions aimed at ... humiliating the dignity ... of a group of people ... on the basis of their attitude to religion," committed publicly.

The logic was Jesuitical, but from a bureaucratic point of view, it was flawless. The major made a note in his notebook. He didn't care who Krishna was. He needed to fulfill his quarterly quota for identifying extremist cells. And these quiet people with their books seemed like the perfect target. They wouldn't fight back. They wouldn't run to the mountains. They would be easy to deal with.

That's how the mechanism was set in motion. Not with a high-profile crime, but with a substitution of concepts. From the moment when the statement "my faith is true" (which, in essence, is made by any believer of any religion) began to be interpreted as a crime against the state.

Andrei, a history student, sat in the university library surrounded by books. But he wasn't reading about Peter I's reforms. He was studying the history of propaganda.

What was happening around the community gave him a frightening sense of déjà vu. He saw parallels that sent a chill down his spine.

"Do you understand what they're doing?" he whispered to Dmitry when they met in the evening after the lecture. "This is classic dehumanization." Dmitry rubbed his nose wearily. "Explain it more simply." "Look. Before you start repressing people, you have to dehumanize your victims. You can't just arrest a neighbor you say hello to. Society won't understand. First you have to prove that he's not your neighbor. That he's a 'stranger.'" Andrei opened his notebook with his notes. "In Rwanda, before the genocide, the radio called the Tutsis 'cockroaches'. In Nazi Germany, Jews were called 'rats' and 'germs'. Note that biological or medical terminology is always used. 'Tumor', 'infection', 'parasite'.

"So what?" Dmitry asked.

"They don't call us cockroaches yet."

"They call us a 'cancerous tumor,'" Andrei replied harshly.

"I read yesterday's article by this 'expert'. He writes: 'Sects are a cancerous tumor on the body of the nation that must be cut out'. This is not a metaphor, Dima. This is an instruction to act. When you call someone a tumor, you imply that it is impossible to negotiate with them. A tumor cannot be treated with persuasion. It must be removed surgically.

Dmitry was silent. As a technical-minded person, he found it difficult to accept this frightening logic. He was used to believing in common sense.

"But we didn't do anything," he said quietly.

"We haven't broken any laws."

"That's the point," Andrei slammed the notebook shut. "They don't need our crimes. They need to declare our very existence criminal. They are creating a 'language of hatred'. They are changing the meaning of words. Now 'preaching' is 'recruitment'. 'Donation' is 'financial fraud'. And 'faith' is 'brainwashing'. As soon as they cement these terms in people's minds and in documents, we will be defenceless. Every step we take will be interpreted against us."

At that moment, Dmitry realized that this was not a discussion. It was a war against them. And it was a new type of war — a hybrid, informational, and legal one. Cities are not being bombed, but meanings are.

The next day, a letter arrived at the community office. It was not spam or a threat from hooligans. It was an official envelope with a seal.

The community chairman, a man with soft features and an eternal smile that today seemed glued on, gathered the activists. On the table lay a document: "Request for Documents."

The prosecutor's office requested the charter, membership lists, financial reports, and, most importantly, samples of literature for a "psychological and linguistic study."

"What does this mean?" asked Elena, Dmitry's wife. Her voice trembled.

"It means that someone has filed a complaint against us," replied the lawyer whom the community had invited for consultation.

"And, judging by the wording of the request, they are specifically looking for extremism."

"But what extremism is there in books about love for God?" wondered the elderly woman, the community's accountant.

"They don't need love," the lawyer said grimly. "They want words. They will look for words that can be interpreted in two ways. For example, the text says: 'Fools who do not know the truth'. The expert will write: 'The use of invective language to create a negative image of the social group 'unbelievers'.

"That's absurd!" exclaimed Dmitry.

"The Bible says, 'The fool says in his heart, there is no God.' Is that extremism too?"

"If there's an order, they'll recognize that too," the lawyer cut in. "You don't understand what we're up against. It's a conveyor belt."

Silence fell over the room. People looked at each other, and their eyes asked the same question: "Is this really happening to us?" They were ordinary citizens. They paid taxes, raised children, loved their country. And suddenly, the state they trusted turned its cold, bureaucratic face on them.

It became known that such requests were not the initiative of the local prosecutor. It was part of the system. The "vigilant citizens" who wrote the statements often turned out to be front men or activists of radical movements close to the Orthodox Church. They were used to create a pretext for investigation.

The scheme was simple and effective, like a trap.

1. Negative information is planted in the media (articles about a "terrible sect").

2. The "concerned public" (in reality, a couple of activists) writes complaints to the prosecutor's office, citing these articles.

3. The prosecutor's office is obliged to respond and orders an investigation.

4. An expert examination is required for the inspection.

5. The expertise is entrusted to "proven" specialists.

The victim did not yet know that the verdict had already been written. All that remained was to go through the formalities.

That evening, Dmitry couldn't sleep for a long time. He lay in the dark and listened to his wife's breathing. Andrei's words about a "cancerous tumor" kept running through his head.

He remembered how a strange young man had come to their church last week. He asked provocative questions, trying to draw the lecturer into a conversation about politics and power. And then Dmitry noticed that the guy had a red light glowing from a voice recorder in his jacket pocket. So they just politely showed the provocateur the door.

Now Dmitry understood: they were gathering material. They were compiling a dossier. Every word spoken in private conversation could be taken out of context and added to the case file.

The feeling of security disappeared. The house was no longer a fortress. The temple was no longer a refuge. They were under surveillance.

Dmitry got up and went to the window. The city was asleep. The lights of the street lamps were reflected in the puddles. Somewhere out there, in dark offices, people who had never seen Dmitry, did not know his children, had never heard his prayers, were deciding his fate. They did not feel any personal hatred toward him. To them, he was just a statistic, a "stick" in a report, a step in their career.

That was the most frightening thing. The banality of evil. Evil did not have horns and hooves. It wore epaulettes, robes, and formal suits. It spoke the language of protocols and decrees.

The "language of hostility" is not just swear words on a fence. It is the dry wording of expert opinions that turn living faith into a dead

article of the Criminal Code.

Dmitry looked at the shelf where the Bhagavad-gita stood. The book was silent. It had survived thousands of years. It had seen the rise and fall of empires. But had it ever seen such cynicism, when its wisdom was being measured with the yardstick of "extremism"?

In the morning, the community was supposed to hand over the books to the prosecutor's office. Dmitry knew that this was only the beginning. He felt the air thickening. Like an invisible noose beginning to tighten.

They still hoped for a mistake. That the experts would read the book and say, "There's nothing wrong here." They believed in human reason.

They didn't know that the experts had already been chosen. And that these experts would not read the book the way people read it. They would dissect it like pathologists, looking for poison where there was medicine.

The decision had been made long before the first book landed on the prosecutor's desk. The machinery of repression had been oiled and set in motion. And it was impossible to stop it with bare hands.

Dmitry returned to bed, but sleep did not come. A phrase from the news rang in his ears: "...for signs of extremism." These words sounded like the clang of a bolt.

Tomorrow they would come for the books. And the day after tomorrow?

The silence in the apartment became deafening. It was the silence before the storm. The time had come when the right to be oneself would have to be paid for at the highest price.

Somewhere in the city, in a desk drawer, lay a draft document that would turn their lives upside down. All that remained was to fill in the date.

Chapter 4: The Visit

The door opened not with a knock, but with a confident, masterful jerk. The ring that sounded a second earlier was just a formality, a tribute to a procedure that no longer had anything to do with politeness.

In the office next to the temple, which usually smelled of sandalwood and freshly brewed herbal tea, the air changed instantly. It was filled with the smell of the street, cheap tobacco, wet leather, and that specific, indescribable aroma of a government institution that clings to the clothes of people accustomed to deciding the fates of others.

Three people stood in the doorway. Two were in uniform, one was in civilian clothes—a gray jacket, jeans, an unremarkable face that you would forget a minute after meeting him. It is precisely such faces that most often make history when it turns into dark alleys.

Dmitry, who was sorting invoices at his desk at that moment, slowly stood up. His heart skipped a beat, but his face remained calm. Years of spiritual practice had taught him to control his initial reactions, but his instinct, as ancient as humanity itself, screamed, "Danger."

"Inspection," the man in plain clothes said curtly, without bothering to greet him. He waved a red ID card in front of Dmitry's face. The gesture was quick and smooth—it was impossible to read the surname or rank. But that wasn't necessary. Authority doesn't need to be introduced. Authority needs obedience.

Behind the visitors loomed two witnesses — frightened students who had probably been pulled straight out of class or caught at the dormitory. They huddled against the doorframe, trying not to look anyone in the eye, realizing that they were involved in something unpleasant and sticky.

"On what grounds?" Dmitry's voice sounded firm, even though his mouth was dry.

The man in plain clothes smirked. It was not a smile, but a grimace expressing a mixture of boredom and superiority. He walked into the center of the room without taking off his shoes. Dirty boot prints were left on the clean floor, where people were accustomed to walking in socks or barefoot. This small everyday gesture was more eloquent than any threat. It said, "Your rules no longer apply here. Now it's our rules."

"We have grounds," he said lazily, looking at the bookshelves. "We received a tip. We are conducting procedural actions. Inspection of the premises and seizure of literature containing signs of extremism."

The word "extremism" hung in the silence of the room, heavy and out of place, like a sledgehammer in an operating room.

Dmitry looked at the shelves. There were neat rows of books. Gold embossing, bright covers. Shrimad-Bhagavatam, Bhagavad-Gita As It Is. Books that spoke of mercy, purity, and service to God. Books that saved him from depression in the nineties. Books that taught his sons to respect their elders and not harm animals.

Now these books were called evidence.

"Are you looking for something specific?" asked the community leader, who came out of the next office when he heard the noise. He was pale but held himself with dignity.

The investigator approached the bookcase and picked up the Bhagavad-gita. He held it not like a book—carefully, with both hands —but like a brick, like a piece of evidence, like an object to be disposed of. His fingers roughly turned the pages, crumpling the thin paper.

"This one," he patted the cover with the image of Krishna and Arjuna. "And all other copies of this edition."

"But this is a sacred scripture," the chairman said quietly. "This book is five thousand years old. These are commentaries recognized throughout the world."

"We don't care how old it is," the operative snapped, throwing the book on the table. The sound of the binding hitting the wood made Dmitry flinch. It was like a slap in the face. "We have the experts' conclusion."

Here it is. It was said.

Dmitry stepped forward.

"What experts? Can we see the report? We have the right to know what we are accused of and on what basis."

The man in plain clothes looked at Dmitry with a long, heavy gaze. There was no hatred in that gaze. There was something worse — the absolute indifference of the bureaucratic machine, for which a person is not an individual, but a set of parameters in a protocol.

"Who are you to make demands?" The operative's voice became quieter, but it rang with metal.

"A lawyer? An attorney? No? Then stand there and be quiet. You'll see the conclusion when the time comes. In court. Or never."

That phrase — "Who are you?" — was the key to understanding what was happening. In an instant, a citizen of his country, a taxpayer, a father of a family, was turned into a powerless object. Dmitry understood: there would be no dialogue. There would be a monologue of force.

Dmitry remembered the stories of those who had already faced a similar steamroller in other regions. People spoke of a feeling of total helplessness. When you stand in front of a representative of the authorities, and he looks right through you. You cease to be a person with a name and a biography. You become a "figurehead." A creature that prevents the closure of accounts.

"Begin," the operative commanded the people in uniform.

What began was what is dryly referred to in protocol as a "seizure," but in human terms feels like desecration.

The police began to sweep the books off the shelves. They did not look at the titles, did not care about their preservation. Books fell to the floor, covers bent. Sacred texts, which believers touched only after ablution, now flew into dirty cardboard boxes and black plastic garbage bags.

Dmitry watched as the image of the chariot disappeared into the black plastic. As the golden letters of the title were swallowed up by the darkness of the bag. It seemed to him that they were not packing

paper and cardboard. They were packing his soul. They were packing his right to think, believe, and breathe.

"Be careful, please," Elena couldn't help saying. She had come into the office to deliver some documents and witnessed the scene. Tears welled up in her eyes. "Those are books!"

One of the policemen, a young man with a pimply face, froze for a second, holding a stack of books. He felt awkward. He saw before him not a "sectarian," but an ordinary woman who resembled his schoolteacher. But the senior officer's shout brought him back to reality:

"Don't get distracted! Load them up faster, the car is waiting."

The bureaucratic cynicism of the situation lay in the fact that none of the security forces present had read the book. They did not know what was written in it. They did not care. For them, it was just "printed material subject to seizure in accordance with the decree." If they had been ordered to seize volumes of Pushkin, they would have shoveled them into bags with the same indifference.

But behind this indifference of the executors lay someone's evil will. The will of those very "specialists" referred to by the operative.

"Listen," Dmitry tried to approach it from another angle. "You're talking about an expert review. But no one notified us that it was being conducted. How can you conduct an expert review of a text without the participation of religious scholars, without notifying the publisher? That's a violation of procedural norms."

The man in plain clothes who was filling out the report at Dmitry's desk (he didn't even ask permission to sit down) looked up.

"Smart, huh?" He tapped the table with his pen. "It's a comprehensive examination. Psychological and linguistic. Conducted as part of a preliminary investigation. Everything is legal. Respected specialists. From the university.

"Which university? Who exactly?"

"You'll find out," he grinned. "It'll be a surprise."

The word "surprise" was jarring. This was no place for surprises. This was where destinies were decided. It was a game of cat and mouse, where the cat had claws, teeth, and the Criminal Code, and the mouse had only its belief in justice, which was fading with every passing minute.

The secrecy surrounding this examination was the most frightening thing of all. If it had been an open investigation, it would have been possible to argue and present counterarguments. But here, the "black box" principle applied. Somewhere in closed offices, without witnesses, unknown people were dissecting an ancient text, taking phrases out of context, distorting their meaning, and turning wisdom into crime.

It was a trial of shadows over light.

Boxes were filled one after another. The office was emptying. The shelves, which until recently had been covered with spines, now gaped with dark voids, like knocked-out teeth.

Dmitry felt a cold rage growing inside him. Not the kind of rage that makes you scream and wave your fists, but the kind that makes your mind crystal clear. He understood: this was no mistake. This was no accident. This was a planned action.

They had come specifically for this book. Not for the financial reports, not for the statutory documents. They had come for the Word.

"Sign it," the operative said, shoving the protocol under the chairman's nose. The chairman put on his glasses and began to read carefully.

"It says 'literature with extremist content' here. I will not sign this. The court has not yet recognized anything.

"If you don't sign, it will be worse," the operative said indifferently. "We'll write that you resisted."

"Write that the literature 'The Bhagavad-gita As It Is' was confiscated. Without any evaluative judgments. Otherwise, I will write my objections in the protocol."

The operative grimaced but corrected the wording. He didn't need any extra paperwork problems. Bureaucracy loves order, even when it commits lawlessness.

When the last box was sealed with tape, an oppressive silence hung in the room. The police carried out the cargo. Heavy boxes with the wisdom of centuries, turned into waste paper for an investigative experiment.

Dmitry watched them leave. He saw how carelessly they threw the boxes into the trunk of their official UAZ vehicle. How the door slammed. How the engine started, spewing a cloud of gray smoke.

When the car drove away, only his own people remained in the office. Smashed shelves, dirt on the floor, the smell of strangers. And a

feeling of desecration. As if barbarians who did not understand the language of beauty had broken into a temple and smashed the statues simply because they were too complex for them to understand.

"What now?" Elena asked, picking up a forgotten bookmark from the floor.

"Now it's court," Dmitry replied.

"They won't stop. Did you see their eyes? They're empty. They're just following orders."

The gray Tomsk day was drawing to a close. People on the street hurried about their business, unaware that just moments ago, in the center of their city, an event had taken place that could change everyone's life. After all, if today they came for the Bhagavad Gita, tomorrow they could come for the Bible, the Koran, the Torah, a volume of Brodsky's poetry, or a biology textbook.

The mechanism of "expert terror" had been set in motion. Its main weapons were not batons or handcuffs, but that very invisible document — the "expert opinion." A piece of paper that gave some the right to decide what was true and turned others into criminals for dissent.

Dmitry remembered a phrase from scripture: "Where there is Dharma (righteousness), there is victory." But now, looking at the dirty footprints on the floor, it was hard to believe that. Reality dictated its own terms. And in this reality, righteousness was being packed into garbage bags.

"We need to find lawyers," said the chairman, taking off his glasses and rubbing his tired eyes. "Good lawyers. And we need to find out who these experts are. We must bring them out into the light. Darkness fears light."

Dmitry nodded. He understood that their peaceful life was over for good. War had begun. Not a war for territory, but for meaning.

That evening, when he got home, Dmitry stood under the shower for a long time, trying to wash away the feeling of the operative's sticky gaze. But the water didn't help. The feeling that you are "nobody," that you are a "creature" without rights, as described in the terrible stories about repression, had now become his personal experience.

He sat down at the table where he usually read in the mornings. The place where his personal copy of the Gita lay was empty. He had hidden the book. He hid it in a laundry basket, like forbidden leaflets are hidden in an occupied city.

This action — hiding a sacred book in his own home — made him tremble. What have we come to? In the twenty-first century, in a country that defeated fascism, people are forced to hide books about love for God.

He took out his phone and dialed Andrei's number.

"They were at our place," he said briefly.

"Did they confiscate them?" The student's voice was tense.

"Yes. Everything that was in the warehouse. They're citing an expert opinion."

"Have you seen it?" "No. They said it's confidential."

"That's bad, Dima. That's very bad. If the expert analysis is secret, it means it's complete nonsense that they're afraid to show before the trial. They're setting a trap."

Dmitry hung up the phone. Twilight was gathering outside the window. The city was lighting up, but the lights no longer seemed friendly. Every streetlight could illuminate the path of a patrol car. Every ring of the doorbell could be the beginning of the end.

But that wasn't the worst part. The worst part was that somewhere in the city, in a quiet office at a university or institute, there were people with academic degrees. They drank tea, checked students' term papers, and smiled at their colleagues. And in between lectures, they wrote a text that would declare millions of people criminals.

They did not hold weapons in their hands. Their weapons were words. Words that kill faith.

Dmitry closed his eyes. He could see the face of the operative and his smirk: "We have a conclusion."

This phrase sounded like a sentence in his head. But a sentence handed down without trial, without investigation, without the right to defense. A sentence signed by invisible people.

Tomorrow they would find out what exactly these invisible people had written. And this text would either become an epitaph to their freedom or the beginning of a battle that would reverberate around the world.

But for now, there was only silence. The silence of empty shelves. And a heavy premonition that the main blow was yet to come.

Chapter 5: The Trial of the Word

The Leninsky District Court of Tomsk did not look like a place where the fate of world religions was decided. It was a typical administrative building, painted in a faded, official color, with narrow corridors covered with worn linoleum and the smell of dusty papers mixed with the aroma of cheap coffee from the vending machine in the lobby. This was where cases involving stolen cell phones, drunken brawls, unpaid alimony, and land disputes between neighbors were usually heard.

But that morning, the atmosphere in the corridor was different. The air seemed thick and electrified. People crowded around the doors to the courtroom. There were not only the usual lawyers and bored secretaries accustomed to the routine of the court, but also representatives of the community — the very people whose faith was about to be weighed on the scales of Russian justice.

Dmitry stood by the window, looking at the gray cityscape. He felt like a character in an absurd play. In his briefcase lay the very book that had started it all. He knew every page, every verse. He knew that this book saved people from drugs, restored families, and gave hope to the dying. And now he stood here, waiting for the prosecutor to call this source of light "extremist material."

The door to the courtroom opened. The bailiff, a young man with an impassive face, grumbled,

"Come in."

The courtroom was small. The dock was empty—today, it was not a person who was on trial. Figuratively speaking, it was the text that lay in the dock. An ancient Sanskrit epic and commentaries on it. It created a surreal feeling. How can you put a book in prison? How can you handcuff a philosophical concept?

The judge entered swiftly. Her robe rustled, creating a sound similar to the rustling of dry leaves. Everyone stood up. The usual phrases about establishing identities, rights, and obligations were spoken. The ritual of justice began.

The prosecutor, a woman with a tired face and a stern gaze, began to read the statement of claim. Her voice was monotonous, devoid of emotion. She read the terrible words as if she were reading a shopping list.

"...to recognize the book Bhagavad-gita As It Is as extremist material... to confiscate it... to include it in the federal list..."

Dmitry listened and caught himself looking for the victims. Every crime must have a victim. Who was offended by this book? Who did it harm? Where were the people whose rights had been violated? But the benches for the victims were empty. In this case, there were no broken windows, no stolen money, no bruises or abrasions. There was only text and its interpretation.

It was a trial of words.

The prosecution's main trump card, the "black box" whose contents had been hidden from the community for so long, was the "Comprehensive Psychological and Linguistic Expert Opinion." The document lay on the judge's desk—a stack of forty pages.

When the prosecutor began to refer to the expert opinion, the defense attorneys tensed up. Finally, the secret was revealed.

The expert opinion was prepared at Kemerovo State University. The commission consisted of three people: a religious scholar, a linguist, and a psychologist. It seemed like a solid scientific approach. But as the details were revealed, confusion grew in the courtroom.

The first blow to the prosecution's logic was the conclusion of the religious scholar. Alexei Gorbaty, a specialist in the history of religions, wrote in black and white in his part of the conclusion: the text of the book does not contain extremism.

Silence fell over the courtroom. If a specialist in the field, a religious scholar, says that the book is clean, then what is the court talking about? Shouldn't that have been the end of the trial?

But things worked differently. The religious scholar's opinion was ignored in the final indictment. The prosecutor emphasized the conclusions of two other experts—linguist Mikhail Osadchy and psychologist Sergei Dranishnikov.

And that's when the real Kafkaesque nightmare began.

The linguist and psychologist, as if by agreement, claimed the opposite. They found "signs of incitement to religious hatred" in the text. Their argument was based on surprising constructions.

"The experts conclude," the prosecutor read, "that the book contains statements that are offensive to an 'undefined group of persons.

"An undefined group of people." This legal phrase sounded like a mockery. How can you offend someone who is undefined? If I say,

"Fools do not understand the highest truth," am I offending all the fools in the world? And who will file a lawsuit on behalf of the fools?

Next came the accusation that the book "justifies the need to restrict women's freedom." Dmitry thought of his wife, Elena, who worked, played music, and led an active social life. Where in their lives was there any restriction of freedom? But the experts did not look at life. They looked at letters taken out of the context of ancient society and stretched them to fit the realities of the modern Criminal Code.

But the most striking thing was something else. When the defense attorneys had the opportunity to examine the text of the expert opinion in detail, they discovered something that made them look at each other with undisguised amazement.

The linguist's and psychologist's studies coincided almost verbatim in places. The same phrases were repeated, and the same fragments of the book were included in the analysis — as if the two sections had been written "by carbon copy."

This was impossible from a scientific point of view. Linguistics and psychology are different sciences, with different methodological apparatus and different terminology. A linguist analyzes text, a psychologist analyzes its impact on the psyche. They cannot write using the same words, unless...

Unless this text was written by one person in advance and simply signed by different people. Or unless they copied pieces from the same manual, handed down "from above."

"Your Honor," the defense attorney stood up. "Please note the similarities in the sections written by the linguist and the

psychologist. The texts of the conclusions are identical in several places. This suggests that the research was not independent."

The judge, a middle-aged woman with an impenetrable face, leafed through the pages. Her eyebrow twitched slightly. She had seen it. Any literate person would have seen it. The "copy-paste" in a document that was to decide the fate of a confession looked not just unprofessional. It looked like outright hackwork, like a slap in the face to justice.

But the machine had already been set in motion. The prosecutor calmly parried:

"This testifies to the unanimity of the experts in their conclusions."

"Unanimity" now meant a lack of independent thought.

Another gem of the expert opinion was the assertion that "the book is capable of influencing the system of social perceptions."

Dmitry barely managed to suppress a bitter smile. Of course it can! Any great book changes perceptions of the world. Crime and Punishment changes perceptions of conscience. Marx's Capital changes perceptions of economics. The Bible completely changed the history of humanity. Isn't that the purpose of literature and philosophy—to change perceptions, to make people think, to seek the truth?

But in the logic of the Tomsk prosecutor's office, a book's ability to influence minds became an aggravating circumstance. The ideal book for them, apparently, was one that did not provoke any thoughts or emotions. A blank sheet of paper.

The defense understood that it was impossible to fight this absurdity with simple logic. Pseudoscientific expertise must be countered with real science.

The lawyer took a stack of documents out of his folder.

"Your Honor, the defense requests that reviews of the expert opinion be added to the case file. We turned to the country's leading experts.

It was a strong move. The defense did not sit idly by. They understood that the provincial court would rely on the piece of paper from Kemerovo as the ultimate truth if they did not show that this piece of paper was not worth the ink with which it was written.

The lawyer began to list them.

"A review by O.V. Orlova, candidate of philological sciences, associate professor at Tomsk State Pedagogical University. A specialist who professionally conducts linguistic examinations."

He paused, allowing the significance of the name to sink in. A local expert, a respected person. "The review notes," the lawyer continued, "that the conclusions of the Kemerovo linguist are not justified and objective due to their inconsistency with the methodology of modern linguistic text analysis. Simply put, my colleague points to the professional unsuitability of this study.

The prosecutor frowned. This was a blow to the foundation of their position.

"Furthermore," the lawyer continued without pause, "the review by Dmitry Olegovich Dobrovolsky, Doctor of Philology, professor, and

leading researcher at the Vinogradov Russian Language Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences.

Russian Academy of Sciences. It sounded impressive. It was a level that the Kemerovo experts could not reach.

"A review by Vladimir Feliksovich Spiridonov, Doctor of Psychology, Associate Professor of the Department of General Patterns of Mental Development at the Russian State University for the Humanities. A review by Alexei Evgenievich Nagovitsyn, Doctor of Philosophy, Candidate of Psychological Sciences, Professor of the Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology at Moscow State University.

The names fell into the silence of the hall like heavy stones. Moscow State University, Russian State University for the Humanities, Russian Academy of Sciences. The cream of Russian science. People who have written dozens of monographs, people whose names are in textbooks. All of them, independently of each other, after studying the Kemerovo expert report, came to the conclusion: this is not science. This is tailoring the solution to the answer.

"The experts pointed out the extreme ambiguity of the expression 'manipulation of consciousness' used by the prosecution," the lawyer quoted. "The authors of the expert report themselves admit that they cannot answer a number of questions due to the vagueness of the wording. But at the same time, they make accusatory conclusions. This is a logical contradiction, Your Honor."

The judge listened. She shuffled through the papers, her face showing signs of deep fatigue. She had a choice to make. On the one hand, there was the powerful, well-argued position of the Moscow

professors, common sense, and the law. On the other hand, there was "telephone justice," pressure, and this expert opinion from Kemerovo, which the prosecution had taken up as its banner.

The situation was a stalemate. The judge had no legal grounds to trust the Kemerovo experts more than the professors from Moscow. But she probably had other reasons that were not being discussed openly.

Dmitry looked at the judge and tried to understand: did she see the person behind these papers? Did she understand that what was being decided now was not the question of confiscating the print run, but whether millions of people had the right to believe in God as they wished?

During the break, the lawyer approached Dmitry. He looked excited but composed.

"We've completely demolished their expert opinion," he said quietly. "From a scientific point of view, there's nothing left of it. Copy-paste, substitution of concepts, ignoring the opinion of a religious scholar. In a normal court, the case would be closed right now due to lack of evidence.

"And in this court?" Dmitry asked.

The lawyer paused, watching the bailiffs scurrying down the hallway.

"Here, we're not fighting facts. We're fighting orders. Did you see the prosecutor's eyes? She doesn't care what the academics say. She has a job to do. And she'll keep pushing until the end. They'll cling to every comma.

Dmitry nodded. He could feel it. The sense of a Kafkaesque trial was growing stronger. Reasoned arguments bounced off the armor of accusation like peas off a wall.

"They claim that our truth offends others," Dmitry said thoughtfully. "But every believer considers his faith to be true. A Christian believes that the way is only through Christ. A Muslim believes in the Koran. If we follow the logic of these experts, we should ban all religions."

"Exactly," the lawyer confirmed. "It's Pandora's box. If they set a precedent with the Gita, tomorrow they'll come after anyone. They're creating a mechanism, a universal club. Any text that says 'our way is the right way' could be declared extremist."

The hearing resumed. The prosecutor, as if she had not heard the defense's arguments, continued to push her line. She demanded that a new expert examination be appointed if the court had doubts about this one. She was stalling for time. She understood that the blitzkrieg had failed and was moving on to a positional war.

The judge announced a recess until the next day.

When Dmitry left the courthouse, it was already dark outside. A cold wind blew in his face, throwing handfuls of stinging snow. The city went about its business. People hurried home to warmth, TVs, and dinner. They did not know that just moments ago, in this gray building, a battle for their right to think had taken place.

Dmitry got into his car. His hands were shaking slightly—the tension of the last few hours was taking its toll. He put his hand on the passenger seat, where a book usually lay. Now it was empty.

He remembered the words from the Gita: "For those who are born, death is inevitable, and for those who have died, birth is inevitable. Therefore, do not give in to grief while fulfilling your inevitable duty."

His duty now was not to give up. To stand before this faceless machine and speak the truth, even if the machine refused to listen.

But inside, a feeling of unease was growing. Today they had seen the face of the enemy. And it was not the face of a villain. It was the face of a bureaucrat armed with pseudoscience. The enemy was armed not with a gun, but with a pen and a seal. And this enemy was much more dangerous because he acted in the name of the law, distorting the very essence of the law.

Dmitry started the engine. The headlights caught a piece of dirty snowdrift in the darkness.

The process was just beginning. And the most frightening thing was that the judges, prosecutors, and experts spoke the same language—the language of instructions and paragraphs. Dmitry and his friends spoke the language of conscience and soul. It was a dialogue between the deaf and the mute.

And in this dialogue, the last word would belong to those who held power. Unless... unless this absurdity became so loud that it would be heard beyond the confines of this cold Siberian city.

Dmitry drove out onto the avenue. He did not yet know that the echoes of this trial would soon reach Delhi and Washington. But for now, he was alone with the winter road and a heavy premonition that

tomorrow would bring new trials of logic, in which black is called white and holiness is called a crime.

Chapter 6: An Outside View

Rajiv struggled to open his eyes. The airplane window was covered with a frosty pattern, through which a gray, lifeless light barely penetrated. The pilot announced the landing at Bogashyovo Airport. The temperature outside was minus thirty- -two degrees. For a man who grew up in New Delhi, where even in winter the air smells of dust and spices, and the cold means only the need to put on a light sweater, these numbers sounded like the coordinates of another planet.

Rajiv Sarkar, a special correspondent for a major Indian news agency, was not flying to Siberia for the exotic experience. He was flying to see with his own eyes what his editor refused to believe until the very last moment.

"This is some kind of translation error, Rajiv," said the editor, twirling a printout of the report from Russia in his hands. "Or fake news. Russians love the Bhagavad Gita. Tolstoy loved it, Bunin read it. They can't judge the book. It's like judging sunlight for being too bright."

Rajiv thought so too. He had studied in Moscow in the early 2000s, spoke Russian fluently, and knew the country as a place of deep culture and paradoxical soul. The news that in the university city of Tomsk, the prosecutor's office was demanding that the main sacred text of Hinduism be recognized as extremist material seemed like a bad joke. Absurd. A bureaucratic glitch.

But when the ramp touched the concrete and the icy wind hit his face, bringing tears to his eyes, Rajiv realized that people here did not like jokes.

Tomsk greeted him with snowdrifts as tall as a man and silence. It was not the peaceful silence of a temple, but the tense silence of a fortress awaiting siege. Rajiv checked into a hotel, dropped his bag, and immediately dialed Dmitry's number, which he had been given by his colleagues in Moscow.

The meeting was scheduled at a small cafe in the center. Dmitry came not alone, but with a lawyer. They looked tired. Dmitry had the red eyes of someone who hadn't slept in a long time, and the lawyer kept glancing at his phone screen.

"Namaste," Rajiv folded his palms in a traditional greeting. Dmitry smiled weakly and responded with the same gesture. There was so much hope in this simple movement that Rajiv felt uncomfortable. They looked at him as if he were a messenger from the normal world who had come to confirm that they had not gone mad.

"Tell me," Rajiv asked, taking out a voice recorder. "Just the facts. I read the indictment, but my brain refuses to process it. Are they really claiming that Krishna incites violence?"

The lawyer, a middle-aged man with a sharp gaze, laid a folder on the table.

"Not just violence. They claim that the book promotes the idea that people are inferior based on their religious affiliation."

"But that's theology!" exclaimed Rajiv. "Every religion says, 'My path leads to God.' If I say my mother is the best in the world, am I

insulting all other mothers?"

"In Tomsk, yes," the lawyer replied dryly. "Here, logic works differently. Here, the text is read not as philosophy, but as instructions for assembling a bomb."

Rajeev picked up a copy of the very expert opinion that everyone had been talking about. He began to read. Russian was his second language, but wading through this jungle was physically painful. The text was dry, clumsy, and imbued with some kind of bureaucratic malice.

"...the formation of a negative image...", "...impact on the psyche...", "...propaganda of superiority...".

Rajiv paused at the paragraph where the experts analyzed the comment about "fools."

"Listen," he looked up at Dmitry. "In India, the Bhagavad Gita is found in almost every home. Sometimes people swear on sacred texts, and the law allows for oaths "according to custom." Gandhi said that it was his spiritual guide and constant companion. If we follow the logic of these experts, then is Gandhi an extremist? And are more than a billion Indians accomplices to extremism?

"We tried to explain it," Dmitry said quietly. "We talked about cultural heritage, international resonance, diplomacy. But the prosecutor looks at us with empty eyes and says, 'We have the experts' conclusion.' For them, India does not exist. There is only the text on paper and Article 282 of the Criminal Code.

Rajiv felt anger boiling up inside him. It was an insult. Not just a legal technicality, but a slap in the face to an entire civilization. The

people who wrote this didn't just misunderstand the subject. They despised it.

"Who are these experts?" he asked. "I want to talk to them. Are they scientists? Indologists? Sanskritologists?" The lawyer smiled bitterly.

"If only. They're psychologists and linguists from the local university. None of them are Sanskritists or Indologists. They just took the Russian translation and analyzed it, looking for marker words."

The next day, Rajiv decided to conduct his own investigation. He couldn't believe that in a university town known as the "Athens of Siberia," the scientific community had silently swallowed such profanity.

He went to the university. The old buildings, high ceilings, and smell of books — everything here breathed academicism and respect for knowledge. Rajiv arranged a meeting with one of the local religious scholars, who agreed to talk only on condition of anonymity.

They met in an empty lecture hall. The professor, an elderly man with an intelligent beard, nervously wiped his glasses.

"You must understand," he said, lowering his voice. "These are the times we live in."

"What are you afraid of?" Rajiv asked bluntly. "You are scholars. It is your duty to defend the truth. Here, a book that is a monument of world culture is being judged. Why is the department silent?"

"Because this is not a scientific dispute, young man. This is a commission." The professor put on his glasses and looked at Rajiv with anguish. "Do you think those who wrote the expert report are

idiots?" No. They are just people who want to keep their jobs, get grants, and not quarrel with the rector's office and the authorities. They were given a task: to find extremism. And they found it. If they had been told to find a call to vagrancy in Kolobok, they would have found that too.

"But that's a disgrace," Radhiv couldn't hold back. "The whole world will laugh."

"They don't care about the world. They live in their own closed coordinate system. For them, there are 'us' and 'them'. Your 'Gita' is 'them'. And that means she's dangerous."

Rajeev left the university with a heavy heart. He realized that the problem was much deeper than the incompetence of individual experts. He was facing a crisis of conscience. People who were supposed to educate had become instruments of repression. Academic degrees and titles were used as a cover for ideological purges.

In the evening, he sat in his room and wrote a draft article. The title came to him naturally: "The Trial of God in Siberia."

"Imagine," he wrote, "that tomorrow in Delhi some court decides to ban Dostoevsky because Raskolnikov killed an old woman, and this can be interpreted as an instruction to act. Absurd? Of course. But that is exactly what is happening in Russia right now. Only instead of Raskolnikov's axe, here we have the ancient wisdom about duty and the soul."

He reread the case files. The more he delved into the details, the clearer it became to him: this was not a mistake. A mistake can be

corrected if it is pointed out. Here, however, the system responded to any arguments with aggression.

Radhiv remembered his conversation with Dmitry about how people's attitudes were changing. How neighbors stopped greeting each other. How articles about "sectarians" appeared in the press.

"It's a technique," Rajiv whispered.

He had seen the same thing in other countries. Creating an image of the enemy. Dehumanization. First, you call a book "extremist," then you call the people who read it "fanatics," and then society is ready to isolate those people.

But the most frightening discovery was yet to come. While studying the documents, he stumbled upon references. The experts based their conclusions not on academic works, but on brochures and articles by certain authors. The names were repeated. The same surnames, the same organizations.

Rajiv started googling. The threads led from Tomsk to Moscow, and from there even further, to Europe. He found references to conferences where the "sectarian threat" was discussed. He saw that the Tomsk trial was not an initiative of the local prosecutor. It was a trial balloon. A test drive of a new repressive machine.

If they succeeded in banning the Bhagavad-gita, then they could ban anything. Any dissent that did not fit into the Procrustean bed of "tradition."

On the third day, Rajiv went to court. The hearing had not yet begun; he just wanted to see the scene of the action. The courthouse looked gray and uninviting. An ordinary box. No grandeur of justice. Here,

in these narrow corridors, the fate of relations between two great powers was being decided.

At the entrance, he met a group of Indian students studying at Tomsk Medical University. They recognized the journalist and surrounded him.

"Sir, is it true?" asked a young man with frightened eyes. "Are they going to take the Gita away from us?"

"We are afraid to pray in the dormitory," added a girl. "The commandant said that if she sees the book, she will call the police. She said it is banned literature."

"Not banned yet," Rajiv said firmly. "The court hasn't decided yet."

"But they're acting as if they already have," the student replied quietly.

Rajeev looked at these young people. They had come here to study, paid their fees, respected the law. And suddenly they found themselves under suspicion simply because they had brought with them a book that their mother had given them before they left.

This was the very "human factor" that was completely absent from the prosecutor's papers. For the structure, there were no living people. There were "figures" and "an indefinite circle of persons."

Rajiv realized that his mission was changing. He had come to write a report about a curiosity. Now he had to become the voice of common sense in a kingdom of crooked mirrors. He had to shout loud enough to be heard in Delhi.

He returned to the hotel and called his editor.

"Listen to me carefully," he said, without waiting for a greeting. "This is no joke. And this is no mistake. They are seriously going to declare Gita an extremist."

"Are you sure?" The editor's voice trembled.

"I have the report in my hands. They call Krishna 'a character who calls for genocide'. They call our faith 'a threat to national security'. This is war, boss. A cultural war. And if we remain silent, they will win."

There was silence on the line. Then the editor said: "Write. Write everything. We'll put it on the front page. We'll raise the issue in parliament."

Rajiv hung up the phone. Outside the window, snow was falling, blanketing the city. He felt strange. He was a foreigner, a guest. But now he felt pain for Russia, perhaps even more acutely than the Russians themselves. He loved this country. And it hurt him to see it wounding itself, trying to cut out part of its soul with the blunt scalpel of pseudo-expertise.

In his notebook was a phrase spoken by that same anonymous professor: "The law on extremism has become a club. And this club is in the hands of people who cannot tell the difference between prayer and a call to rebellion."

Rajiv looked at his Gita lying on the nightstand. A small book with a worn cover. It contained answers to questions about life and death. But it did not contain an answer to the question: what to do when madness becomes law?

The answer would have to be found here, in snowy Tomsk.

He opened his laptop again. He needed to prepare. Tomorrow he would go to court not as an observer, but as a witness for the prosecution against the trial itself. He would ask questions. Uncomfortable, tough questions. He would look for those behind the local prosecutors.

He already knew that the trail led to the organization that the lawyer had mentioned in passing. RATSIR. A name that meant nothing to his readers in India.

Rajeev did not yet know the whole truth. He did not know the extent of the network that had ensnared the country. But he had already found the thread. And he was going to pull on it with all his might.

An outside perspective proved to be the most honest. Because from the outside, it was possible to see what the locals had become accustomed to.

Chapter 7: Theater of the Absurd

The courtroom of the Leninsky District Court in Tomsk resembled an aquarium from which the air had been pumped out. It was stuffy here, not because of the temperature, but because of the density of absurdity that had accumulated in the confined space.

Dmitry sat on a hard wooden bench, feeling his legs go numb. Next to him, with his back straight and his face tense, sat his lawyer. Opposite them sat the prosecutor, a woman with a tired look on her face, who was sorting through papers. But they were not the main focus of attention.

In the center of the room, behind a small podium, stood a man. He was the expert. The very specialist whose signature on the document had turned the ancient text into "extremist material."

The judge, a middle-aged woman whose face expressed a mixture of boredom and hidden irritation, tapped her pen on the table.

"Introduce yourself to the court. State your education and place of work."

The man behind the podium adjusted his tie. He looked confident, even slightly arrogant. It was the confidence of a man who knows that he has an organization behind him, and that this organization never fails.

"Sergei Dranishnikov, psychologist. Lecturer at Kemerovo State University."

Rajiv, sitting in the back row, turned on his tape recorder. He caught every word, every movement. For him, a man who had grown up in a culture where disputes over sacred texts had been conducted by sages for millennia, what was happening seemed like a bad dream. He had expected to see a scientific discussion. He had expected to hear arguments. Instead, he saw a bureaucratic farce.

The defense attorney stood up. His movements were smooth, but his eyes burned with the cold fire of a hunter who had cornered his prey but did not yet know how dangerous the beast was.

"Tell me, esteemed expert," he began insinuatingly. "What is your area of expertise? Do you have a degree in religious studies?"

"No," the expert replied curtly. "I am a psychologist."

"And in linguistics? Philology? Oriental studies?"

"No. I told you, I'm a psychologist."

"Okay. Do you know Sanskrit? Hindi? Bengali? Any language in which the original texts of the tradition under study are written?"

"No, I don't. And I don't consider it necessary. We studied the Russian text."

A murmur rippled through the hall. Dmitry clenched his fists so tightly that his knuckles turned white. The man who couldn't read a single word in the original, who couldn't tell the Vedas from the Upanishads, was now deciding the fate of his faith.

"Let me clarify," the lawyer continued, his voice becoming harsher. "You conducted a comprehensive examination of the sacred text of Hinduism without having a specialized education in religious studies

and without knowing the original language. On what basis did you draw conclusions about the meaning of religious terms?"

The expert smiled.

"We were not evaluating religion. We were evaluating the psychological impact of the text on the reader. The text contains inductors capable of altering consciousness.

"Change consciousness." This phrase sounded like an accusation of witchcraft. Radhiv quickly wrote in his notebook: *"They are judging the book for making people think differently*."

What followed could be described as a theater of distorted mirrors. The prosecutor asked the expert to give examples of "extremist statements." The expert opened a folder and began to read.

"Here, on this page. Quote: 'Anyone who does not follow the precepts of the sacred scriptures is called a demon. End of quote. He looked up at the judge. "Here we see a clear humiliation of a group of people on the basis of their attitude toward religion. The author calls people who do not share his views 'demons'. This creates a negative image, dehumanizes opponents, and can serve as a call to violence against them."

Dmitry almost jumped out of his seat.

"It's a metaphor!" he whispered. "Demonic nature is greed, anger, ignorance! It's not a call to kill your neighbors!"

The judge looked sternly at Dmitry.

"Defendant, be quiet. You will have your say."

The defense attorney, without losing his composure, parried:

"Tell me, expert, are you familiar with the concept of religious metaphor? In Christianity, sinners are called 'slaves of sin,' and in Islam there is the concept of 'infidel.' Following your logic, are the Bible and the Koran also extremist literature?"

The expert hesitated for only a second.

"We are not discussing other books. We are discussing this one. In this context, the word 'demon' is perceived by the modern reader as an indication of an enemy that must be destroyed.

It was a surprising, twisted logic. The expert took an ancient philosophical term, took it out of the context of five thousand years of history, and put it into the context of 21st-century crime reports. For him, "fighting illusion" turned into a street fight, and "killing ignorance" turned into Article 105 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation.

Rajiv listened and understood: what he was dealing with was not science. What he was dealing with was a paid job. The expert spoke in clichés. His speech was full of specific terms: "mind control," "destructive influence," "group dependence." These words did not come from academic psychology.

"Tell me," the lawyer interjected again. "Did you use any approved methodology for analysis?"

"Yes, of course. The content analysis method."

"Can you name the authors of the methodology? The scientific school?"

The expert named several names. The lawyer nodded to his assistant, who quickly began searching for something on his tablet. A minute later, a piece of paper was placed on the lawyer's table.

"Your Honor," the defense attorney said loudly. "The methods referred to by the expert are not intended for the forensic examination of religious texts. Moreover, they are considered controversial in the scientific community."

The expert shrugged.

"This is my professional opinion. This is how I see it."

There it was. The magic phrase: "That's how I see it." At that moment, Article 307 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation — "Knowingly false expert opinion" — was invisibly present in the courtroom. It would seem that it should hang like a sword of Damocles over the head of the man behind the podium . But the lawyer knew the bitter truth that was whispered in the corridors of legal conferences.

Article 307 was a paper tiger. It growled, but it didn't bite.

To hold an expert accountable, it was necessary to prove direct intent. It was necessary to prove that he *knew* the truth but *deliberately* lied. And in the humanities — in psychology, linguistics — the line between lying and "bona fide error" was thinner than cigarette paper.

The expert could write any nonsense, call white black, and love hatred. And if he was cornered by facts, he could always say, "This is my scientific position. I belong to a special school. That's how I interpret it." And the law backed down. The "gray areas" of

legislation turned the trial into a minefield, where the prosecution had a map and the defense was blindfolded.

"You claim," the lawyer continued his questioning, "that the text promotes the exclusivity of one's own faith. But doesn't every religion claim that its path is the true one?

"Here it is done in an aggressive form," the expert retorted. "It is claimed that Krishna is the Supreme Personality of Godhead. This automatically belittles other religions and atheists. It creates social tension."

"So," the lawyer clarified, "the phrase 'God is one' is extremist because it offends those who believe in many gods or do not believe at all?

The expert began to get annoyed.

"Don't twist my words. We are talking about a specific book. It creates an image of the enemy. The enemy is a materialist. The book calls for renouncing material attachments. This destroys social ties, family, and the state."

Dmitry looked at the expert and saw not a scientist, but a robot. A human function. He spoke in memorized phrases, as if reading from an invisible teleprompter. It was obvious that he had not read the Bhagavad Gita as a book. He scanned it for triggers.

"Family, state." Those were the buttons they pressed. They tried to portray monks and devout lay people as a threat to the foundations of society. Although these were the most law-abiding citizens, paying taxes, not drinking, not smoking, raising children. But the court was

not interested in the facts of real life. It was only interested in the virtual reality created in the offices of Kemerovo experts.

The next to speak was a linguist. A young man, clearly nervous but trying to keep up appearances. His testimony was even more absurd.

"We analyzed the semantic field of the text," he said, avoiding eye contact with the lawyer. "And we found frequent use of imperatives. 'Fight,' 'kill,' 'win.

"But we're talking about the battlefield of Kurukshetra!" Rajiv couldn't hold back, forgetting that he had no right to speak. "It's an epic! There's a war going on! How can you describe war without the words 'fight'?"

The bailiff took a step toward the journalist. Rajiv raised his hands in an apologetic gesture, but his words hung in the air.

The lawyer picked up on this idea.

"My colleague is right. The text describes a historical event — a battle. Are you proposing to ban the description of military action in literature? Shall we ban Tolstoy's War and Peace too? People are killed in that too.

The linguist blushed.

"In War and Peace, it is artistic fiction. Here, it is presented as a guide to action for modern people. The commentator writes: 'You must kill the demon of doubt within yourself.' The word 'kill' has a distinctly negative connotation.

"Kill time," "kill boredom," the lawyer began to list. "Are these also calls for violence? Against time and boredom?"

Someone in the courtroom giggled. Even the court clerk's lips twitched. The absurdity of the accusation was obvious to anyone with a high school level of Russian. The experts confused literal and figurative meanings, ignored context, and substituted concepts.

But the judge did not laugh. She looked at her watch. For her, it was a long day at work. She had to follow procedure. Hear both sides, file the minutes. Living logic crashed against the granite wall of formalism.

"Does the defense have any more questions for the experts?" she asked wearily.

The lawyer looked at his clients. He saw their confusion. They had come here seeking justice, but found themselves on a conveyor belt.

— Yes, Your Honor. One question. Tell me, experts, are you familiar with the works of Russian Indologists? With the translations by Smirnov and Sementsov? Have you compared the text under investigation with other translations?

The linguist and psychologist exchanged glances.

"No," replied the psychologist for both of them. "That was not our task. We worked with the material provided."

"So you made a judgment about a book that is part of the world's cultural heritage, completely detached from its cultural and scientific context?" the lawyer summarized.

"We answered the investigators' questions," the expert snapped. "Within the scope of our competence."

"Within the scope of our competence." The phrase sounded like mockery. Their competence ended where conscience began.

The hearing was coming to an end. The judge announced a recess until the following week. People began to disperse. The experts quickly, almost running, left the courtroom, not wanting to meet the gaze of those they had just slandered from the podium.

Dmitry and Rajiv went out onto the courthouse porch. The frosty air burned their lungs, but after the stuffiness of the courtroom, it felt like a relief.

"Did you see that?" Rajiv asked, lighting a cigarette. His hands were shaking. "They're talking complete nonsense. They're not even trying to sound convincing."

"They don't need to," Dmitry replied, looking at the gray clouds.

"Did you hear the prosecutor? She never took her eyes off the paper. She doesn't care what we say. She has her 'conclusion'. It's an indulgence."

The lawyer approached them, hiding the documents in his briefcase.

"It's bad," he said bluntly. "The judge doesn't want to get involved. She's taking the path of least resistance. There's a paper from the 'scientists,' so there's a basis for a decision."

"But we've refuted their arguments!" exclaimed Rajiv. "Any normal person can see that this is nonsense!"

"Court isn't a place for normal people, Rajiv. It's a place for procedures. And the procedure has been followed. Is there an expert opinion? Yes. Have they been warned about their responsibility

under Article 307? Yes. And the fact that they're talking nonsense is, as they put it, their 'scientific opinion.'"

Dmitry remembered the face of the expert psychologist. There was no fanaticism in his eyes. There was emptiness. The emptiness of a performer who simply does his job without thinking about the consequences. Today he recognized the Bhagavad Gita as extremist. Tomorrow, if ordered, he would find a call to overthrow the regime in the fairy tale "Cipollino."

It was the banality of evil in its pure, distilled form. There were no fires of the Inquisition, no torture chambers. There were only sheets of A4 paper and people in gray suits who had turned lying into a profession.

"What are we going to do?" Dmitry asked.

"Order our own expert reports," replied the lawyer. "Get Moscow involved. Make some noise. They'll crush us if we stay quiet. We need someone else besides us to see this theater of the absurd."

Rajiv threw his cigarette butt into the trash can.

"I'll write," he said firmly. "I'll write in such a way that they'll choke on their morning tea in Delhi. They think this is a local matter in the Siberian wilderness. They are mistaken."

They stood on the steps of the courthouse — a Russian engineer, an Indian journalist, and a lawyer. Three small figures against the backdrop of a huge state machine. Cars drove by, people hurried home. The city went about its business, unaware that inside this gray building, an attempt had just been made to overturn common sense.

Dmitry looked at the court windows. Behind the glass, the lights were going out. But the darkness that had thickened in the courtroom had not disappeared. It was simply lying in wait until the next time.

He understood that today they had lost the battle. The experts had left undefeated, hiding behind the shield of "subjective opinion" and a flawed law. But the war was just beginning. And the worst thing was that the enemy was playing with marked cards, and the rules were changing right in the middle of the game.

"You know what's the worst part?" the lawyer said quietly as they walked to the car. "They don't even hate you. They just don't care. To them, you're just a statistic. A check mark on a report. A bonus for the quarter."

Dmitry remained silent. He remembered a phrase from scripture: "When religion declines and godlessness reigns, I myself will come down." Now, looking at the dirty snow in Tomsk, he thought that the time of decline had already come. And it looked not like chaos and destruction, but like a neatly filed folder with a case.

But this file contained lies. And lies, no matter how official they may be, have a tendency to rot. The smell of this rot had already begun to seep through the walls of the court, and soon the whole world would smell it.

Dmitry got into his car. Ahead of him lay a long road home and an even longer road to the truth. He didn't know if they would have the strength to see it through to the end. But he knew one thing: there was no turning back.

And somewhere in his office at the university, expert Dranishnikov was probably already drinking tea, satisfied with how skillfully he had fended off the defense's attacks without saying a word of truth. He felt like a winner. He did not know that his name would soon become a byword, a symbol of shame for all Russian science. But for now, he slept peacefully, confident in his impunity, guaranteed by that very "gray area" of the law.

Chapter 8: The Construction of Lies

By the end of the week, Radziv's hotel room had turned into an operational headquarters. The bed was littered with printouts, stacks of books and folders piled up on the table, and the air seemed to be saturated with the smell of cheap tobacco. Outside the window, another Siberian blizzard was raging, but here, in the confined space of the room, a storm of a different kind was raging—an intellectual one.

Rajiv sat cross-legged on the floor, rereading page forty-two of the Comprehensive Psychological and Linguistic Report for the tenth time. Next to him, sitting on a chair, was the defense attorney, Mikhail, who seemed to have been awake for several days.

"Do you see this?" Rajiv asked, pointing to a paragraph. "They're citing Wikipedia. In a forensic report!" Mikhail rubbed his nose wearily.

"If only it were just Wikipedia, Rajiv. Look deeper. Look at the bibliography."

Rajiv turned the page to the bibliography. His gaze slid over the lines, and with each passing second, his eyebrows crept higher and higher. He expected to see a list of academic works: monographs on Indology, Sanskrit dictionaries, works on comparative religious studies. Instead, he saw links to internet resources with dubious names.

"Reference number twelve," he read aloud. "The website 'Iriney.ru'. Reference number fifteen — 'Missionary-Apologetic Project 'To the Truth'. Mikhail, what is this? Are these scientific portals?"

"These are anti-cult websites," replied the lawyer. "This is journalism. Tabloid press disguised as a fight for spirituality. Experts who are supposed to be impartial scientists base their conclusions on articles written by people who are professionally engaged in inciting hatred.

It was a revelation that changed everything. Until that moment, the defense had tried to argue with the experts as scientists who might have been mistaken. Now it was clear: they were not dealing with scientists. They were dealing with propagandists.

That same day, they met with Dmitry at the lawyer's office. They needed to develop a strategy. Dmitry looked depressed but composed. He brought his laptop with him, which had a spreadsheet open on it—as an engineer, he was trying to systematize the madness.

"I checked the experts' names," Dmitry began. "None of them have any publications on Hinduism in peer-reviewed journals. Not a single one. The psychologist specializes in occupational psychology, the linguist in Russian studies. They don't understand what they're reading at all."

"They didn't read it," Mikhail interrupted. "I conducted a linguistic analysis of the expert report itself. And I found something interesting."

The lawyer displayed two pages of the document on a large monitor. On the left was the part written by the psychologist. On the right was the part written by the linguist. "Read the parts highlighted in yellow."

Dmitry squinted.

"The text contains inductors capable of having a destructive effect on the reader's psyche, forming a negative image of a social group..."

He shifted his gaze to the right side.

"The text contains inductors that can have a destructive effect on the reader's psyche, forming a negative image of a social group..." Dmitry froze. "It's word for word."

"Exactly," nodded the lawyer. "Entire paragraphs. Identical grammatical structures. Identical, very specific punctuation errors. The probability that two different people, working independently, would write an identical half-page text is zero."

"What does that mean?" Rajiv asked, even though the answer was already on the tip of his tongue.

"It means that the expert report was written by one person," Mikhail said harshly. "Or, even worse, they simply copied pieces from some manual that was handed down to them from above. This is called intellectual fraud. They didn't examine the book. They tailored the decision to the answer."

Silence hung in the room. It was becoming obvious that the "scientific basis" of the accusation was fiction. A house of cards. But

this house was sealed with the stamp of a state institution, and it was incredibly difficult to destroy it.

Mikhail began to pace around the office.

"Do you understand what the tragedy is? In Russian courts, expert opinion is the queen of evidence. The judge cannot decide for herself whether the book is extremist or not. She is obliged to ask an expert. And so the expert brings her a paper. It says, 'Extremism is present'. The judge sees the seal, sees the signature, sees the scientific-sounding terms — 'induction', 'semantic field', 'psychological violence'. And she accepts it as fact.

"But that's a lie!" exclaimed Dmitry. "We can see that it's a lie!"

"We can see it," agreed the lawyer. "But for the system, it's a document. Legalization of arbitrariness. They use complex language to mask the emptiness. They write 'mind manipulation,' but they can't explain what it is from a scientific point of view. They use the term 'totalitarian sect,' which does not exist in the legal field, but which works like a red rag.

Rajiv recalled his conversations with colleagues in Europe. They had encountered something similar there. "It's a technique," he said. "I've read about it. It's a method of discrediting. First, you create a pseudoscientific term. Then you find an 'expert' who is willing to endorse that term. And then you use it in court as a club."

He took out his notebook.

"I found information on how such schemes work. Often, so-called 'one-day experts' or specialists from non-specialized universities are used. Why Kemerovo? Why the Pedagogical University? Why not the

Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow?

"Because at the Russian Academy of Sciences, they would have been laughed at," Dmitry replied. "But in Kemerovo, they found people to do the job."

Rajiv decided to dig deeper into the sources cited by the experts. The reference to the "Missionary-Apologetic Project 'To the Truth'" bothered him. He opened the website.

A torrent of aggression poured out of the screen. Articles with headlines like "Beware: Krishnaites!", "Spiritual Contagion," "How to Save Your Child from a Cult." The language of these publications was far from scientific or even journalistic. It was the language of war.

And then he stumbled upon a familiar name. Maxim Stepanenko. Head of the missionary department of the Tomsk diocese.

Rajiv began to read his reports. Stepanenko didn't just write articles. He bragged. He openly and proudly described his activities as "information warfare."

"For example, in 2011, I... wrote almost 170 articles and news reports... this year, more than 10 articles on the Krishnaite theme have already been published... the visit of Professor Alexander Dvorkin was organized, and a special section dedicated to the trial of Bhagavad-gita As It Is was created."

Rajeev reread this sentence twice. "Organized the visit of Professor Alexander Dvorkin." Dvorkin's name had already come up in conversation, but only in passing, as the name of a theorist. Now it was clear: there was a direct connection.

"Look," Rajiv showed the laptop screen to Dmitry and Mikhail. "This Stepanenko writes that he 'created a section dedicated to the trial.' He knew about the trial before we did. He was laying the groundwork."

"And experts refer to his website," Mikhail continued. "The customer creates 'information noise' and writes articles with accusations. Then the prosecutor's office orders an expert examination. Instead of studying the book, the experts go to the customer's website, take the theses from there, rewrite them in scientific language, and present them as a 'conclusion.'"

It was the perfect scheme for falsification. A self-reproducing lie. One person shouts "Wolves!", the second writes down "A signal has been received about the presence of wolves," and the third confirms "According to source number one, the presence of wolves has been scientifically proven." And the fact that there are no wolves no longer matters to anyone.

Dmitry felt a cold rage growing inside him.

"They call us fanatics," he said quietly. "But look at this Stepanenko. '170 articles.' Who's the fanatic here? Who's obsessed with destroying others?"

Mikhail nodded. "It's classic projection. They attribute their own sins to you. They accuse you of intolerance while displaying extreme intolerance themselves. They accuse you of manipulation while using the dirtiest manipulative techniques."

The lawyer took another document out of the folder. It was a review of the expert opinion they had commissioned from an independent

specialist in Moscow.

"Listen to what a real scientist writes about the methods of our opponents. 'The experts go beyond their competence. They replace legal concepts with ideological clichés. They use the method of 'cherry-picking quotes', when phrases about spiritual struggle are interpreted as calls for physical violence.

Dmitry remembered the court. He remembered the prosecutor's eyes.

"They don't care," he said. "We can bring them a hundred reviews. They have a task to accomplish."

"They have a task," Mikhail agreed. "But they also have a weak spot. Their arrogance. They are so confident of their impunity that they work rudely. This 'copy-paste,' these links to websites, this lack of specialized education — all of these are traces. And we must rub their noses in these traces at every hearing."

In the evening, Rajiv was left alone. He tried to piece together the scattered facts into a coherent picture for his article. The headline "Anatomy of a Lie" was perfect, but the editor asked for something more specific. Rajiv wrote: "The Hate Factory: How Extremists Are Created Out of Thin Air in Siberia."

He thought about how easy it is to destroy a reputation in the modern world. All it takes is a few "experts" willing to sign any paper for the sake of a grant or loyalty to their superiors.

Another detail emerged in his materials. It turns out that such schemes were used not only against the Krishnaites. In other regions, the same people, the same "expert councils" wrote conclusions

against the Pentecostals, against books on psychology, even against yoga.

A source sent to him by a colleague from Moscow described a case involving an expert named Astakhova.

"The expert committed intellectual fraud... She attributed to the author something he did not have. In other words, I believe she committed intellectual fraud. It's as if, when assessing the cause of a person's death, she would drop some poison in and say that he was poisoned."

Rajiv understood that this was a metaphor for the whole process. The Tomsk experts "dripped poison" into the Bhagavad Gita. They took the pure water of the ancient text and added their own fears, their own prejudices, their own ideological attitudes to it. And then they told the court, "Look, the water is poisoned!"

But who gave them this poison?

Stepanenko was just the executor, the loudspeaker. The experts were the tool. But there had to be a hand holding that tool. A hand that guides.

Radziv looked again at the phrase in Stepanenko's report: "The arrival of Professor Alexander Dvorkin has been arranged."

This name was beginning to sound like a refrain. It was everywhere. In footnotes, in conference titles, in manuals. It seemed that this man's shadow covered the entire process.

Dmitry called late in the evening.

"Rajiv, I found something else. Remember when we talked about commercial structures?"

"Yes."

"I checked the organization that processed the payment for the expert opinion. It's a fly-by-night company. Their charter documents don't even list 'forensic expertise' as a type of activity. They list 'vegetable trade' and 'consulting services'.

"Are you kidding?" "No. It's a classic scheme for laundering responsibility. If tomorrow the expert opinion is found to be false, the university will say, 'We had nothing to do with it, it was a private order.' And the firm will simply disappear."

Rajiv felt the puzzle coming together. This wasn't just an ideological attack. It was business. Business based on repression. Someone was receiving government money to fight "extremism" by creating that extremism with their own hands.

"It's the mafia, Dima," Radziv said into the phone. "Not in the sense that they shoot people. It's a bureaucratic mafia. They've created a closed cycle: they scare society themselves, they 'identify' the threat themselves, they conduct the investigation themselves, and they receive the rewards for it themselves.

"And we've fallen into the gears of this business," Dmitry's voice was dull.

"Yes. But now we know how this mechanism works. We can see the gears. And if we can see them, we can try to jam them with a crowbar."

The next day in court, the defense went on the offensive. Mikhail, armed with the results of their nighttime investigation, began methodically destroying the experts' reputation.

"Your Honor," he said, holding a printout from the website "To the Truth" in his hands. "The expert claims to have used scientific literature. But here is source number 15. It is a propaganda resource administered by a citizen named Stepanenko, a person directly interested in the outcome of the case. Is this admissible evidence?"

The prosecutor tried to object, but her arguments sounded weak.

"It's reference information..." she muttered.

"Reference?" Mikhail raised his voice. "They call people 'Satanists' and 'biological waste' there. You call that reference information? And on *that* basis, you demand that a sacred book be banned?"

The judge was silent. She leafed through the expert report, and for the first time, something resembling doubt flashed across her face. It's one thing to sign a sentence based on a "scientific conclusion." It's another thing to become an accomplice to an outright farce, where printouts from hate blogs are used as evidence.

They did not win the case that day. But they did something important. They tore off the experts' mask of impartiality.

Rajeev left the court feeling that they had struck a nerve.

"We've gotten to the heart of the matter," he said to Dmitry. "This isn't science versus religion. It's lies versus truth. And these lies have specific authors."

He knew that the most difficult part was ahead of them. They had to prove that the Tomsk experts were just puppets. That the strings led to Moscow, to the office of the man who had turned "sectology" into a tool of political influence.

Radhiv took out his phone and dialed the editorial office number.

"Get the column ready," he said. "I have the material. The title: 'Verdict without evidence: how fake experts judge God.

In the darkness of the Siberian night, somewhere in an office with a sign that read "Center for Religious Studies," someone was probably already starting to get nervous. Because the lie had been exposed, and it looked disgusting.

Chapter 9: Dvorkin's Shadow

The night in Radziv's hotel room was filled with the hum of a laptop and the rustling of paper. Outside the window, the wind howled, throwing handfuls of stinging snow against the glass, but inside, the atmosphere was one of cold, calculated analysis. On the table, lit by a single lamp, lay two stacks of documents. On the left was the text of the "Comprehensive Psychological and Linguistic Assessment," which formed the basis of the indictment. On the right were printouts from the internet and photocopies of pages from a thick hardcover book.

Rajiv rubbed his tired eyes and took a sip of cold coffee.

"Dima, look here," he called.

Dmitry, who was sitting in a chair with a tablet, came over to the table. Rajiv traced a line in the expert opinion with a marker.

"Let's read the experts' conclusion: 'Each of the totalitarian sects strives for power, and this thirst for power is their main driving force, hidden behind religious rhetoric. ' Sounds scientific, doesn't it? Like the result of a deep psychological analysis.

Dmitry nodded.

"And now," Rajiv picked up the book on the right. The cover read: "Sectology. Totalitarian Sects." Author: Alexander Dvorkin. "Open to page one hundred and forty-two. Let's read."

Rajeev placed the book next to the conclusion. The text matched down to the comma.

"Each of the totalitarian sects strives for power..." Dmitry whispered. "They just copied it."

"They didn't just copy it," Radziv's voice became harsh. "They are quoting an ideological manifesto as scientific fact. The experts from Kemerovo did not conduct any research. They took their guru's manual and rewrote it on official letterhead."

At that moment, a shadow seemed to fall over the room. Until then, they had been fighting faceless bureaucracy, incompetence, and stupidity. Now this hydra had a head. And that head had a name.

Alexander Leonidovich Dvorkin.

This name had come up before. It flashed in footnotes, was heard in lawyers' conversations, and was mentioned on websites like "To the Truth." But until that night, it seemed distant, theoretical. Now it was obvious: the Tomsk trial was not the initiative of a local prosecutor. It was an operation developed and directed from a single center.

Rajiv began to lay out on the floor the diagram he had been drawing for the past two days. In the center, he wrote in large letters: RACIRS. Russian Association of Centers for the Study of Religions and Sects.

"Look how it works," Rajiv pointed to the connections with his pen. "We thought that Maxim Stepanenko, who writes lampoons in Tomsk newspapers, was just a local madman with an active civic position. But that's not the case. Stepanenko is the head of the

missionary department of the Tomsk diocese. And this department is part of RACIRS.

He drew a line upwards. "And the president of RACIRS is Alexander Dvorkin. Stepanenko is his direct subordinate. His soldier."

Dmitry looked at the diagram. The scattered facts began to form a frighteningly clear mosaic.

"So," he said slowly, "first Dvorkin writes a book in which he calls us a 'totalitarian sect'. Then his subordinate Stepanenko organizes a smear campaign in the local media, using terms from this book. Then the prosecutor's office, , responding to the noise, orders an expert examination. And instead of studying the Bhagavad-gita, the experts open Dvorkin's book and copy the accusations from it.

"Exactly," Rajiv confirmed. "It's a vicious cycle. They don't need facts. They don't need proof of guilt. They have Dvorkin's 'sacred scripture,' which is more important to them than the Constitution."

Rajiv returned to his laptop. He opened a file with Dworkin's biography.

"Who is he?" Dmitry asked. "Why do prosecutors and judges listen to him? Does he have a degree?"

"That's the thing," the journalist smiled. "He calls himself a professor, but his education is a PhD in history from the United States. He is not a religious scholar, a lawyer, or a psychologist. He is a historian. But in Russia, he has managed to create an image for himself as the leading expert on 'spiritual security.'"

Photos flashed across the screen. A man with a beard, wearing glasses, with a cold, heavy gaze. He spoke at conferences, sat on presidiums, shook hands with generals and officials.

"Here, look," Radziv opened a document from the Ministry of Justice website. "Since April 2009, Alexander Dvorkin has held the position of chairman of the Expert Council for State Religious Studies Expertise at the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation."

Dmitry felt a chill run down his spine.

"Chairman of the council under the Ministry of Justice?"

"Yes. A man who openly calls Hinduism "Satanism" heads the council that decides which religions to allow and which to ban. Now do you understand why the Tomsk prosecutor's office is so confident? They have "protection" at the very top. They know that if the case goes to Moscow, Dvorkin will cover for them with his authority.

It was a frightening discovery. They believed that a court was a contest between two sides, where the one with the stronger arguments would win. But it turned out that they were playing cards with a cardsharp who not only marked the deck, but also owned the casino.

Rajiv began reading aloud excerpts from Dvorkin's articles that they found online. This was necessary to understand the enemy's logic. To understand exactly what they were up against.

"Listen carefully," said Rajiv. "This is what he writes about methods of struggle: 'Since all totalitarian sects believe that the end justifies

the means, they all place their own interests above the law... In essence, we are dealing with mafia structures.'"

"That's projection," Dmitry interrupted. "He's describing us, but he's talking about himself."

"Exactly!" "Psychologists call this mirroring. Look at the structure of RACIRS. A rigid hierarchy. The unquestionable authority of the leader. Intolerance of criticism. The presence of its own ideology, which justifies any means for the sake of a supposedly 'good cause.'"

Rajiv found another document — a transcript of a speech by Archpriest Dmitry Smirnov, one of Dvorkin's associates, at a RACIRS conference.

Quote: "We hired them, you understand? They are our employees." He is talking about officials and deputies. About representatives of the authorities.

Dmitry froze.

"Do they consider the state to be their tool?"

"Yes. They have infiltrated the state structure. They give lectures at the FSB and Interior Ministry academies. They tell cadets that 'sects' are the main threat to national security. They shape the worldview of those who later put on epaulettes and come to search your home.

Now it became clear why the operatives behaved so cynically during the search. Why they looked at books as if they were weapons. That's how they were taught. For years, they were drilled with the idea that behind the smiles of the Krishnaites lay a "mafia structure" seeking to seize power.

Dvorkin created the perfect virus—the virus of fear. He took complex social phenomena and packaged them into a simple, understandable term: "totalitarian sect." This term worked like the label "enemy of the people" in the 1930s. No need to understand theology, no need to study culture. Just slap on a label, and any arbitrariness becomes justified.

"RATSIRS is not a scientific organization," Rajiv continued, quickly typing notes for a future article. "It's a combat structure. An information special forces unit. They send out manuals to the regions. I am sure that the text of the Tomsk expert report was agreed upon in Moscow even before it was signed in Kemerovo."

Dmitry walked over to the window. The city slept, covered in snow. Somewhere out there, in the darkness, the judge, the prosecutor, and the experts slept. People slept who may not even have realized that they were pawns in someone else's game.

"We are not fighting against a book," Dmitry said quietly. "And not even against the prosecutor. We are fighting against ideology. Against fanaticism that has donned the mask of statehood."

"And this fanaticism is dangerous because it mimics the protection of traditions," added Rajiv. "Dvorkin claims to be defending Orthodox Christianity. But does Orthodox Christianity need to be defended with lies and forgery? Did Christ teach us to slander our neighbors?"

Rajeev found another quote from Dvorkin that struck him with its cynicism. "If their members are ordered to consider the goal set before them 'righteous' and 'just,' they will not hesitate to lie, steal, mislead people... or slander officials."

"That's a call to action for his own followers!" exclaimed Dmitry. "Did the experts lie in court? Yes, they did. Did Stepanenko slander us in the newspapers? Yes, he did. They are doing exactly what they accuse us of doing."

A heavy silence hung in the room. The realization of the scale of the enemy weighed heavily on their shoulders. It's one thing to defend yourself against a mistake. It's another thing to stand in the way of a machine that has been greased with hatred and money for years.

Yes, money. Radziv discovered that fighting sects is not only an idea, but also a business. Grants, lectures, paid expert opinions.

"I found some information," said the journalist, without looking up from the screen. "When Dvorkin comes to the regions to give lectures, he is paid fees. His associates are paid. It's an industry. If the "sects" disappear tomorrow, they will be out of work. It is in their interest for the enemy to be scary and omnipresent. They need to constantly maintain a level of hysteria to justify their existence and funding.

Dmitry remembered the face of expert Dranishnikov in court. His indifference. His willingness to sign any paper. Now that face looked different. It was the face of a mercenary. A minor player in a huge corporation that manufactures fear.

"You know what's the scariest thing?" Dmitry asked. "They sincerely believe they're doing good. Dvorkin convinced them that they're warriors of light. That any lie in the name of fighting the 'sect' is a holy lie."

"That's a sign of totalitarian thinking," Rajiv nodded. "Dividing the world into black and white. 'If you're not with us, you're against us.' Dvorkin created a cult within the anti-cult movement. Dvorkin's cult."

Rajeev began to sketch out the structure of a new chapter in his book. He would call it "Dvorkin's Shadow." He had to show the world that behind the Tomsk prosecutors stood a man who had assumed the right to decide who to believe and how to pray.

"We have to say this in court," Dmitry said firmly. "We have to name the puppet master."

"The lawyers are preparing a motion," Rajiv replied. "We will show the court that the expert report plagiarizes Dvorkin's work. We will show the connection between the customers and the contractors. We will tear off their mask of 'independent experts.'"

But both of them had doubts. Would the judge be brave enough? After all, declaring the expert opinion invalid would mean challenging not just three teachers from Kemerovo, but the chairman of the Expert Council under the Ministry of Justice.

"Rajiv," Dmitry looked at his friend. "What if they win? What if Dvorkin pushes the situation?"

"Then Russia will become a different country," the Indian replied seriously. "A country where any book can be banned if one person doesn't like it. A country where expertise becomes a tool of repression. It will set a precedent. After the Gita, they will come for the Koran, the Torah, the Protestant Bible. Dvorkin won't stop. Appetite comes with eating."

Rajeev recalled the historical parallels he had read about. In Germany in the 1930s, they also began with the "defense of traditional values" and the fight against "alien elements." They used the same rhetoric: "tumor," "infection," "parasites." Dvorkin, who had lived and studied in the West, knew these techniques well. And he brought them to Russia, adapted them, and implemented them.

"Look," Radziv opened another tab. "The FECRIS website. The European Federation of Centres of Research and Information on Sectarianism. Dvorkin is the vice president of this organization."

"Is it an international network?"

"Yes. RACIRS is their branch. They coordinate activities throughout Europe. But in Europe, their influence is limited by laws and civil society. In Russia, they found ideal ground. Dvorkin gave them a goal and methods."

Dmitry sat down on the edge of the bed. His head was buzzing. As a civil engineer accustomed to precise calculations and structural analysis, it was physically painful for him to immerse himself in this world of intrigue and manipulation.

"I just wanted to build houses and read books," he said bitterly. "I didn't want war."

"The war came to you, Dima. Because you allowed yourself to be free. And for Dvorkin, freedom is the main threat. They need obedient cogs, not thinking individuals."

Rajiv closed his laptop. It was already three in the morning.

"Tomorrow will be a difficult day," he said. "We will begin to attack their foundation. We will demonstrate that their 'science' is plagiarism, and their 'expertise' is ideological propaganda."

Dmitry nodded and began gathering his papers.

"Thank you, Rajiv. Without you, we wouldn't have seen the whole picture. We would have floundered in the details, arguing over commas. Now we can see the enemy face to face."

When Dmitry left, Rajiv stood at the window for a long time, watching the blizzard. He thought about how one man, driven by ambition and intolerance, could poison the life of a huge country. Dvorkin sat in Moscow, in his warm office, perhaps drinking tea from a porcelain cup. And here, in Siberia, destinies were being destroyed, children who had been bullied at school were crying, and women were waiting for searches.

Dvorkin's shadow covered Tomsk. It was long, cold, and clinging. But Radziv knew one thing about shadows: they disappear when you turn on a bright light.

And he was going to turn that light on full blast.

A printout with a quote remained on the table: "In essence, we are dealing with mafia structures." Radhiv circled these words with a red marker. Now it was not an accusation against the Krishnaites. It was a diagnosis of the very ideology created by the number one "sectologist."

In the morning, this paper would be on the judge's desk. And that would be the moment of truth. Either the court would recognize the

obvious, or it would finally admit that justice no longer existed in this building.

Rajeev went to bed, but sleep would not come. The diagram was before his eyes: RACIRS — Ministry of Justice — Prosecutor's Office — Court. A web. And in the center of this web sat not a spider, but a man with a professor's beard, convinced that he had the right to judge God.

But he forgot one detail. In history, all inquisitors sooner or later ended up the same way—in the dustbin of history. And the books they tried to burn continued to live on.

Tomorrow, a new chapter in this battle will begin. A chapter in which the victim will stop making excuses and start telling the truth as it is.

Chapter 10: The Collapse of Arguments

The morning of the tenth day of the trial began not with the usual shuffling of feet and rustling of papers, but with a heavy, oppressive sense of anticipation. The air in the Leninsky District Courtroom thickened. If in the early days there was an atmosphere of bureaucratic routine, where the outcome seemed a foregone conclusion, today the invisible scales of Themis began to tremble.

Dmitry took his place on the bench. He noticed how the prosecutor's face had changed. The icy confidence with which she had read the indictment a week ago had disappeared. Now she was nervously rearranging her folders, glancing frequently at the door from which the main characters in today's drama — the experts — were to appear.

Rajiv sat in the third row, notebook at the ready. He already knew that today the defense would go on the counteroffensive. The lawyers, Mikhail and his colleagues from Moscow, had prepared a trap. Not a legal one, but an intellectual one. They were going to do what the system feared most: force the perpetrators to think and be accountable for their words.

"All rise, court is in session!"

The judge entered quickly, but her movements no longer had their former mechanical quality. She looked focused, even alert. She

sensed that the trial was spiraling out of control, turning from an ordinary administrative case into something that hundreds of eyes were watching.

The first to be called to the stand was expert psychologist Sergei Dranishnikov. He walked out confidently, adjusted his jacket, his whole demeanor demonstrating his readiness to fend off any attacks. He did not yet know that his confidence was a house of cards standing in the wind.

Mikhail rose from his seat. His voice was quiet and polite, but there was steel beneath the politeness.

"Esteemed expert," the lawyer began, holding the text of the conclusion in his hands. "On page eighteen, you claim that the book Bhagavad-gita As It Is uses methods of 'psychological violence.' Could you explain to the court what exactly you mean by this term in the context of scientific psychology?"

Dranishnikov smiled slightly, as if explaining obvious truths to an unintelligent child. "Psychological violence is an influence on a person's psyche that suppresses their will and forces them to accept alien attitudes.

"Excellent," Mikhail nodded. "Tell me, is television advertising that encourages people to buy a certain product psychological violence?"

"No, that's marketing."

"What about parents raising their children when they forbid them to do something?"

"That's pedagogy."

"Then what's the difference?" the lawyer took a step forward. "The book talks about the need to control your feelings. That's a basic practice of any asceticism. Why do you classify the call for self-discipline as violence? What scientific method did you use to distinguish between these concepts?"

The expert hesitated. He began to leaf through the pages of his copy of the expert report.

"We used a comprehensive approach... Analysis of semantic constructions..."

"Name the methodology," the lawyer interrupted sharply. "The author, year of publication, page. The court needs facts, not generalities."

Silence fell over the courtroom. Dranishnikov remained silent. He couldn't name the methodology because it didn't exist. He had used a term taken from journalistic brochures, not academic textbooks.

"I... I relied on my professional judgment," he finally squeezed out.

"Professional judgment must be verifiable," Mikhail countered. "Let's move on. You write about 'mind manipulation.' Please explain what specific markers of manipulation you have identified."

The expert again tried to escape into the thicket of pseudo-scientific vocabulary. He spoke of "suggestive patterns" and "imperative forms." But the more he spoke, the more obvious the emptiness behind these words became.

"You claim that the phrase 'surrender to Me' is manipulation," the lawyer pointed to the paragraph. "But this is a quote from God

addressed to man. In Christianity, there is the phrase 'Thy will be done'. Is that manipulation too?"

"We are not discussing Christianity!" the expert snapped, his voice tinged with hysteria. "We are discussing this text! Here it sounds like an order!"

"So," Mikhail said slowly, turning to the judge, "the criterion for extremism for you is the presence of an imperative mood in the text?"

The judge looked up from her papers. She stared at the expert with a long, unblinking gaze. Her gaze conveyed bewilderment. As a lawyer with twenty years of experience, she was accustomed to clear wording. And here she was being asked to condemn a book on the basis of grammatical forms.

But the main blow was yet to come.

The lawyer changed tactics. He stopped asking about terms and asked about the essence.

"Tell me, Sergei," Mikhail's voice became almost friendly. "Do you understand what your conclusion will lead to? If the court sides with you, the book will be banned. Millions of people will be deprived of their sacred scripture. Are you ready to take responsibility for recognizing as extremist a text that is the basis of faith for a billion people?"

Dranishnikov turned pale. The question was not part of the protocol. It was a question of conscience.

"I... I don't decide the fate of the book," he muttered, looking away. "I just answered the investigator's questions. I was doing my job."

"So you refuse to take responsibility for the consequences of your conclusions?"

"I'm an expert, not a judge!" he almost shouted. "My job is to analyze the text. What the court does with it is not my problem!"

It was the moment of truth. "Not my problem." The phrase hung in the air. The man whose signature could destroy lives was hiding behind his job description. He was ready to accuse, but not ready to answer.

Dmitry saw the judge grimace. To her, a person who handed down sentences every day and put her name on them, this cowardice was understandable and unpleasant. She saw before her not a scholar defending the truth, but a bureaucrat covering his back.

Next, a linguist took the stand. Young and ambitious, he seemed to have learned from his colleague's mistakes and decided to take an aggressive stance. But aggression is a poor substitute for arguments.

The defense attacked him from a flank he did not expect.

"You claim that the word 'fool' used in the comments incites hatred toward the social group of 'non-believers,'" began the second lawyer. "Tell me, is the word 'fool' obscene?

"No, but it has a negative connotation."

"Okay. If a teacher at school says to a student, 'Don't be a fool, study your lessons,' is he committing an act of extremism?"

"The context is different!" exclaimed the linguist. "There it's a teacher, and here it's a religious leader!"

"What's the difference from a linguistic point of view?" the lawyer spread his arms. "The word is the same. Ozhegov's dictionary does not label it 'extremist'. You yourself have given it that meaning. On what basis?"

The linguist began to get confused. He talked about the "communicative task" and the "author's intention." But the lawyer methodically cornered him with simple examples.

"You write that the text is propaganda of exclusivity. Quote: 'Those who worship other gods worship Me, but incorrectly.' Do you see humiliation here?"

"Yes! The word 'wrong' humiliates the dignity of those who think differently!"

"Excuse me," the judge interrupted. For the first time, she asked a direct question. "If a mathematician tells a student that he has solved a problem incorrectly, is he humiliating him?"

The linguist froze. He opened his mouth, closed it, then opened it again. "Your Honor, that's... that's an incorrect comparison. Religion is a delicate matter."

"Exactly," the judge replied coldly. "Delicate. And you're cutting corners."

A whisper rippled through the courtroom. It was a turning point. The judge was no longer playing along with the prosecution. She was beginning to have doubts.

And then the defense played its trump card.

"Your Honor," Mikhail said solemnly. "We see that local experts are having difficulty explaining basic concepts. Therefore, the defense requests that the conclusions of the country's leading experts be added to the case file.

He took a thick folder out of his briefcase.

"The opinion of a Doctor of Historical Sciences, a leading researcher at the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences. The opinion of a Doctor of Philology from the Department of Indian Philology at Moscow State University. The opinion of a professor in the Department of Indian Philology at St. Petersburg University."

The prosecutor jumped up from her seat.

"Your Honor, I object! We already have an expert opinion! Why do we need the opinions of third parties?"

"They are not third parties," the lawyer calmly objected. "They are the elite of Russian science. People who have studied this text all their lives. People who know Sanskrit, know the culture, know the history. Unlike the prosecution's experts, who, as we have discovered, cannot distinguish a metaphor from a criminal article.

The judge took the folder. She slowly leafed through the pages, poring over the regalia and signatures. The seals of the Academy of Sciences, the signatures of world-renowned professors. On one side of the scales lay a hastily compiled expert opinion from the Kemerovo Pedagogical Institute, full of contradictions and fear. On the other was the authority of a century-old academic tradition.

"Admit it," the judge said curtly.

The prosecutor sat down, her posture betraying her defeat. She understood what was happening. Her "ironclad" case had crumbled to dust. She had no weapon against science.

Mikhail began to read excerpts from the conclusions of Moscow scientists. "The claim that Bhaktivedanta Swami's commentaries are extremist in nature is absurd and testifies to the complete incompetence of the authors of the expert opinion..." "The terms 'fool,' 'demon,' and 'scoundrel' in the context of the Indian philosophical tradition are technical terms describing certain types of consciousness and cannot be interpreted as everyday insults..." — "Attempting to judge an ancient text by the laws of a modern secular state without taking into account the historical and cultural context is an act of vandalism..."

Each phrase fell into the silence of the hall like a stone. It was a crushing defeat. The intellectual destruction of the prosecution's position. Experts Dranishnikov and his colleague sat with their heads bowed. They no longer looked at the hall. They studied the pattern on the tabletop, dreaming of only one thing — for it to end.

Rajiv wrote in his notebook: *"Today we saw how lies fear the light. As soon as we held up the mirror of true science to them, they shrank and lost their power*."

But that wasn't even the most important thing. The most important thing was what was happening to the judge. Dmitry watched her. He saw her attitude change. At the beginning of the trial, she saw before her "sectarians" who needed to be called to order. Now she saw

people who stood for truth and science. And on the prosecution side, she saw confused amateurs trying to drag her into a dirty game.

"Does the prosecution have any questions about the documents presented?" the judge asked. The prosecutor slowly stood up.

"We need time to review them," she said flatly. "We request a recess."

It was a retreat. An attempt to buy time to regroup, call Moscow, and get new instructions.

"The court adjourns until tomorrow," the judge banged her gavel.

As the courtroom began to empty, Dmitry approached the lawyers.

"Did we win?" he asked hopefully. Mikhail shook his head. He was a realist.

"We won the battle, Dima. But not the war. Did you see their faces? They're scared, but they haven't given up. The system doesn't know how to admit mistakes. Now they'll go and consult. They'll look for new moves. They can put administrative pressure on the judge."

Rajiv approached them, beaming.

"That was brilliant! Did you see how the linguist floundered on the question about the teacher? This should be broadcast live!"

"Quiet, Rajiv," the lawyer cut him off. "Don't forget where we are. Logic only works halfway here. The other half is telephone law."

They went outside. Tomsk greeted them with a gray sky and wet snow. But the air seemed cleaner. For the first time in many months, they had real hope. The prosecution's arguments had collapsed.

However, the anxiety remained. Dmitry understood that a cornered beast is twice as dangerous. The experts had been publicly humiliated. The prosecution had lost face. And the people behind them — the very puppeteers from Moscow — were unlikely to forgive such a failure.

That evening, sitting at home, Dmitry reread the news. The federal media began to write about the trial. The tone was changing. Whereas previously the headlines had screamed about the "trial of a sect," now questions were appearing: "Who are the judges?" "The experts were unable to explain their conclusions." Public opinion was beginning to shift.

But Dmitry knew that the main enemy had not yet entered the game in full force. Those who set this flywheel in motion would not be deterred by facts. If the facts were against them, so much the worse for the facts.

A phone rang in the silence of the apartment. It was Rajiv.

"Dima, I just spoke with the editor. They're preparing a big article. But there's something else."

"What?" "I received some information from Europe. It turns out that the methodology your experts used — all this nonsense about 'manipulation' and 'mind control' — is a carbon copy.

"Copied from what?"

"From documents that were developed in France in the nineties to combat religious minorities. And do you know who is promoting these methods internationally?"

— Who?

— The organization we talked about. FECRIS. And our friend Dvorkin is their vice president.

Dmitry hung up the phone.

"Are you saying that this isn't just a Russian invention?"

"No. It's a global international anti-cult network."

Dmitry put down the phone and walked over to the window. The collapse of their arguments in court was only the beginning. They had destroyed the facade, but behind it lay an abyss. Now they had to fight not with local ignoramuses, but with an international machine that had spent decades honing its skills in turning faith into a crime.

Tomorrow promised to be even more difficult. The prosecutor would return with new instructions. The judge would be under tremendous pressure. And somewhere in the upper echelons, decisions were already being made on how to save the honor of the uniform, even if it meant stepping over the law and common sense.

But today, in this cold courtroom, the most important thing was said: "I am not ready to take responsibility." The expert admitted his cowardice. And this knowledge gave him the strength to stand firm until the end.

Chapter 11: The FECRIS Web

The laptop screen glowed in the dim light of the hotel room, the only source of light, illuminating Rajiv's tired face. It was three in the morning, but sleep would not come. The journalist sat motionless, like a statue, staring at the document that had just arrived via an encrypted channel from his colleague in Brussels.

The file was simply titled: "Structure_FECRIS_2011.pdf."

Rajeev took a sip of cold coffee, grimaced at the bitterness, and looked back at the diagram. Lines, arrows, names, organization names. It resembled a subway map, only instead of stations, there were centers of influence, and instead of trains, hatred and lobbyist money ran along these tracks.

He dialed Dmitry's number. The dial tone was long and drawn out.

"Rajiv?" The engineer's voice was hoarse from sleep.

"What happened? Did they come again?"

"No, Dima. No one came. But I think I understand where they're coming from. Don't hang up. I'll send you a file right now. You need to see this. And wake Mikhail up. We need to meet. Right now."

Forty minutes later, they were sitting in Dmitry's cramped kitchen. Outside the window, a gray, damp Tomsk dawn was breaking, but no one paid any attention to the weather. On the kitchen table, having

pushed aside the sugar bowl and napkins, Rajiv laid out the printouts.

"We thought we were fighting local government arbitrariness," Rajiv began, tapping his finger nervously on the paper. "We thought Dvorkin was a Russian phenomenon, a homegrown inquisitor who had captured the minds of local prosecutors. We were wrong.

He handed Dmitry a sheet of paper with a logo depicting a stylized web of connections.

"Meet FECRIS. Fédération Européenne des Centres de Recherche et d'Information sur le Sectarisme. European Federation of Centers for Research and Information on Sectarianism. Headquarters in France."

Mikhail, wiping his glasses, snorted skeptically:

"European Federation? Sounds impressive. Human rights activists?" "If only," Rajiv smiled bitterly. "It's an umbrella organization. An octopus. And guess who's been the vice president of this octopus since 2009?"

Mikhail put on his glasses and leaned over to the list of board members. His finger paused on a familiar name.

"Alexander Dvorkin. Vice-President." Exactly. Alexander Leonidovich Dvorkin doesn't just quote Western manuals. He writes them. Or, at least, he sits at the same table with those who approve them. RACIRS is not an independent organization. It is the Russian branch of FECRIS.

Dmitry picked up the printout. As a technical person, it was important for him to understand the mechanism.

"Wait, Radziv. If this is a European organization, they must respect human rights. Europe is obsessed with tolerance. How can they support what is happening here in Tomsk?"

"That's the main paradox," Rajiv began pacing around the small kitchen, gesturing. "My colleague from Italy sent me a detailed analysis. FECRIS was created in 1994 by the French anti-cult organizations UNADFI and CCMM. And do you know who finances them?"

Rajeev paused dramatically. "The state. The French government. More than 90 percent of these organizations' budgets come from government grants. They're not public servants, Dima. They're a state machine for suppressing dissent, disguised as NGOs."

He took out the next document—a table with figures.

"Look. UNADFI and CCMM receive more than 97% of their funding from government agencies and less than 3% from private individuals and supporters. For comparison, Doctors Without Borders receives only 5% from the state. What does that tell you?"

"That they have no public support," Mikhail said slowly. "If people really considered 'cults' a threat, they would donate money to fight them. But here we see an artificial structure that survives solely on taxpayers' money."

"Exactly!" exclaimed Rajiv. "It's a business."

Rajiv opened an article on his laptop titled "FECRIS: An Extremist Group in the Heart of Europe." "Listen to what the Italians are writing: 'The mere fact that Italy, France, and Russia are reproducing virtually the same anti-cult rhetoric is extremely disturbing.' They call it 'puzzle coding.' A unified information field of hatred is being created."

Dmitry felt a chill run down his spine. He remembered how his neighbors' faces changed when they read articles in local newspapers.

"So it's not a coincidence," he said. "It's not just the malicious intent of Stepanenko or Dvorkin. It's a technology."

"Yes, Dima. It's a technology of dehumanization. First, they come up with the term 'sect'. Then they fill it with terrible connotations: murder, apartment seizures, brainwashing. And then they slap that label on any group they don't like. Today it's you. Tomorrow it will be the Pentecostals. The day after tomorrow it will be yoga enthusiasts.

Raviv turned the page in his notes.

"And the most interesting thing. Do you know what unites Russian and Western anti-cultists, apart from their methods? Conspiracy theories. He read a quote from the investigation: "It is worth noting that both Western and Russian anti-cultists believe in the theory of an American conspiracy... Russian anti-cult ideologues claim that Russia's 'spiritual security' is threatened by American conspiracies spreading 'cults.'"

Mikhail laughed bitterly.

"How ironic. Dvorkin, a US citizen who came from America, uses anti-American rhetoric to fight against an Indian book in Russia. It's some kind of postmodern absurdity."

"Absurdity that destroys lives," Dmitry said harshly. "But why? Why is this necessary?"

"Power," Rajiv replied. "Control. When you declare a group of people a 'cult,' you remove them from the legal field. You can do whatever you want with them. It's the perfect tool for any state that wants to tighten the screws. This anti-cult network holds conferences and trains officials, judges, and police officers."

Rajiv showed a photo from one of these conferences. It showed people in expensive suits sitting on a podium. Among them was Dvorkin.

"Look. Riga, 2018. Brussels, Paris. They travel all over Europe at public expense. They create the appearance of a scientific community. But in reality, as my source writes, "FECRIS members, largely devoid of academic titles and professional competence, have other 'qualities' in their biographies that make them, at the very least, unreliable."

"Like our Tomsk experts," Dmitry nodded. "No titles, no conscience. Only loyalty."

Mikhail stood up and walked to the window. The city was waking up. People were rushing to work, buses were taking schoolchildren to school. Life as usual. But now that life seemed like a fragile facade.

"We have to use this in court," said the lawyer without turning around.

"It's dangerous," Rajiv warned. "We'll be touching on some very serious people. The investigation mentions that political elites are behind RACIRS. The names of ministers and high-ranking officials are mentioned. It's called the 'Diveyevo Brotherhood'. A secret order within the government."

Dmitry looked at the journalist with concern.

"Are you saying that we are fighting not only Dvorkin, but also part of the government?"

"It seems so. The source claims: 'It is suspected that they are financed and ideologically supported by the Diveyevo Brotherhood... which includes high-ranking officials of the current Russian leadership.

Silence fell in the kitchen. All that could be heard was the hum of the refrigerator. The scale of the enemy grew with each new fact. First, it was the local prosecutor. Then, a Moscow professor. Now, an international network supported by European governments and Russian ministers.

"We are ants," Dmitry said quietly. "Ants trying to stop a tank."

"But the tank has a weak spot," Rajiv objected. "It's afraid of light. This whole FECRIS system only works in murky waters. They call themselves 'secular,' but they act like fanatics. They call themselves 'experts,' but they have no education. They talk about 'protecting the family,' but they destroy families by turning children against their parents."

Rajiv took out another sheet of paper.

"Here's an example of their work. The story of the CAN organization in the US. Cult Awareness Network. They did the same thing — kidnapped people for deprogramming, harassed believers. Do you know how it ended?

"What?"

"Bankruptcy. They were inundated with lawsuits. In 1996, they lost the court case and were forced to close. Their property was auctioned off."

Rajiv's eyes were burning.

"Evil is not all-powerful, Dima. It comes at a high price. And it breaks when it comes up against the law. Real law, not the surrogate they're trying to foist on us in Tomsk.

Mikhail returned to the table and began to quickly make notes in his notebook.

— So, here's the deal. We're changing our defense strategy. We're no longer making excuses. We're attacking their competence through their affiliations. We're demanding that they disclose their methods. If they say "Dvorkin's method," we'll show Dvorkin's connection to FECRIS. We'll show that this isn't science, but a commissioned project.

"What about India?" Dmitry asked. "How is that related to us?"

"Directly," replied Rajiv. "India is just another territory for them to clean up. They don't respect culture. For them, the Bhagavad Gita is just a competitor. A competitor for minds, for influence. They want a monopoly. A monopoly on truth."

Rajiv remembered another detail from the documents.

"They also work with China. FECRIS supports Chinese policy against religious minorities. They justify repression. Can you imagine? A European organization justifies China's totalitarian methods. It's a global alliance against freedom of conscience."

Dmitry rubbed his temples. His head was spinning from the abundance of information. For him, a man who was used to believing in goodness and common sense, it was physically painful to realize how cynical this world was.

"So our 'Gita' is just an excuse?" he asked.

"Yes. It's a test. A trial by fire. If they manage to ban a book with a five-thousand-year history, a book that half the world respects, then they have free rein. It means the mechanism is well-oiled and ready for mass use."

Rajiv gathered the papers into a folder.

"I'll write about this. I won't just write an article. I'll write an investigation into how European money is financing hatred in Siberia. My colleagues in Brussels and Paris are ready to pick up the story. We'll raise a fuss in the European Parliament. Let Mr. André Frederic, president of FECRIS, explain to his constituents why his organization supports the prosecution of sacred scripture.

"Do you think that will help?" Mikhail asked doubtfully.

"Noise is the only thing they fear," Rajiv said firmly. "They are used to operating in the quiet of their offices. Backroom deals, grants,

closed conferences. When the spotlight is turned on them, they start to panic. They start to make mistakes."

Dmitry glanced at his watch. It was almost time to go to court. Another hearing. Another meeting with the prosecutor, who probably had no idea that she was just a cog in the anti-cult machine.

"You know, Radziv," Dmitry said, standing up. "I feel better now."

"Better?" the journalist asked in surprise. "We just found out that an international mafia is working against us."

"Yes. But now I understand what's going on. It's not madness. It's a plan. And if there's a plan, then there are flaws in it. And we'll find them."

They left the house together. Morning Tomsk was shrouded in fog. Somewhere out there, in that fog, invisible threads stretched from the courthouse to offices in Moscow, and from there — across borders and cordons — to the cozy offices of Marseille and Paris. The FECRIS web trembled, reacting to every movement of its victim.

But the victim no longer wanted to be a victim.

Rajiv walked and thought about how strangely destinies had intertwined. An Indian book, a Russian court, French money, Nazi manuals. The globalization of hatred. But globalization works both ways. If hatred can cross borders, so can truth.

He remembered a phrase from a letter from an Italian colleague: "Anti-cultism is a harbinger of future bloody upheavals." It sounded like a warning. If this conveyor belt is not stopped now, here in Siberia, tomorrow it could start working everywhere.

Rajiv's phone vibrated in his pocket. A new message had arrived. Another file. Another piece of evidence.

"Let's go," he said to his friends. "Today we'll teach them a lesson in geography. We'll show the court where the roots of their 'patriotism' really lie."

Dmitry nodded. He felt a cold, calculated determination growing inside him, replacing his fear. He was no longer just a believer defending his book. He was a witness to a crime of global proportions. And he was going to testify.

The same faces awaited them in the courtroom. The tired judge, the nervous prosecutor, the bored bailiffs. But for Dmitry, Mikhail, and Radziv, the scenery had changed. The walls had shifted. Now they could see Dvorkin's shadow behind the prosecutor, and behind it the shadows of other faceless bureaucrats from European committees who had turned the fight against "sects" into a lucrative business.

Mikhail placed a folder with printouts on the table.

"Your Honor," he said quietly to Dmitry. "Today we will begin to tear off the masks. And I'm afraid that what we see underneath will not please anyone."

The web had been exposed. All that remained was to find a way to tear it apart without getting tangled in the sticky threads of lies that had entangled the process from day one. And Radhiv knew that the scissors for this web were not to be found in legal codes, but in openness. In the very truth that, as it is said in the Gita, always wins, even when victory seems impossible.

Chapter 12: The Roots of Hatred

Night fell on Tomsk. In Rajiv's hotel room, which had become an archive of human madness over the past few weeks, only a table lamp was lit. Its yellow light picked out the faces of three men bent over the table from the darkness. There was no room here for legal disputes or procedural subtleties. Today, they had descended to the place where the real roots of what was happening lay beneath the foundation of "expert opinions" and prosecutorial claims.

Dmitry held a printout of an old black-and-white photograph in his hands. It showed a stern man with a cold, appraising gaze.

"Walter Kühnett," he read the caption. "Who is this?"

Raviv, sitting on the floor surrounded by stacks of books and documents, raised his head. His eyes were feverishly shining. He had found what he was looking for—the missing link in the evolution of hatred.

"This is the spiritual grandfather of your Alexander Dvorkin," the journalist said quietly. "And, unfortunately, this is not a metaphor. This is a direct line of succession."

Mikhail, a lawyer accustomed to operating with articles of the code, nervously tapped his pen on the table. He felt uncomfortable. What Rajiv had uncovered went far beyond the scope of jurisprudence. It was the medical history of an entire civilization.

"We tried to understand where this methodology came from," Rajiv began. "Why do experts use these particular words: 'sect,' 'zombification,' 'brainwashing,' 'biological threat'? It turns out that the roots go back to 1921. To Germany."

Rajeev took the photo from Dmitry's hands. "Walter Künnet. Protestant theologian. The man who created the Apologetic Center. Officially, they were engaged in defending the faith. In reality, they were compiling lists of enemies of the Reich.

The journalist opened a folder with translations of German archives.

"Listen carefully. Kühnett collaborated with the Gestapo. He passed them information about 'sects'. And do you know who was at the top of his lists? Not only Jews. Jehovah's Witnesses. Occultists. Pacifists. Anyone who thought differently.

Dmitry felt a chill run down his spine.

"Are you saying that Dvorkin..."

"Dvorkin is a student of Künnet's students," Rajiv interrupted harshly. "The line of knowledge transfer was unbroken. Künnet passed the baton to Friedrich-Wilhelm Haak. Haak passed it to Johannes Ogord. And Ogord was Dvorkin's teacher. It's one school. One methodology. And one goal."

Rajeev laid a document on the table with the title "Comparison of Rhetoric." On the left were quotes from Nazi newspapers from the 1930s. On the right were excerpts from Dvorkin's articles and materials from anti-cult websites.

"Look," Rajiv's finger slid across the lines. "The Nazis called Jews 'rats' and 'parasites.' Dvorkin calls believers 'a cancerous tumor' and 'mold.' The meaning is the same: there are people, and there are non-people. There are citizens, and there is biomass that needs to be cleared away."

Mikhail took off his glasses and rubbed his nose.

"Dehumanization," he said hollowly. "Legally, this is called preparation for genocide. Before you kill a person, you have to prove to society that they are not a person. That they are, for example, a cockroach. It's not a pity to kill a cockroach. Killing a cockroach is a sanitary norm."

"Exactly!" exclaimed Rajiv. "That's the essence of their 'sectology.' It's not a science about religions. It's a science about dehumanization. They take a group of people — Krishnas, Pentecostals, anyone — and begin to methodically turn them into monsters."

He read a quote from his investigation:

Among the destructive Nazi methods that Dvorkin's totalitarian sect has been using for a long time, the following can be highlighted: Dehumanization and demonization. Use of stigmatizing terminology: Dvorkin actively uses terms such as "totalitarian sects," "destructive cults," "psychocults," and "dangerous sects," creating an image of the enemy and contributing to the dehumanization of representatives of target groups. This rhetoric is reminiscent of the language used by the Nazis, who portrayed Jews and Gypsies as "subhuman" and "a threat to society."

Dmitry remembered how his neighbors' faces had changed. How a saleswoman in a store who had known him for ten years suddenly began to look at him with suspicion, as if expecting him to pull out a knife or start chanting spells.

"They did that to me," he whispered. "They turned me into a 'threat to society' just with words."

"It's a technique, Dima," Rajiv nodded. "Hitler wrote that 'the masses' are more easily victimized by a big lie than a small one — because they don't believe in such a degree of audacity. The anti-cultists from RACIRS have adopted this principle. They bombard people's minds with the same clichés. 'The sect kills,' 'The sect takes away apartments,' 'The sect is agents of the West. ' And people start to believe . Even if there are no facts. Even if the Bhagavad Gita teaches love. Fear is stronger than logic.

Rajiv took out another document.

It was a copy of a secret circular from Reinhard Heydrich, head of the Security Police and SD.

"Look at this. June 1941. 'Action against "secret teachings" and so-called "secret sciences"' (a campaign against the occult — what the secret services called 'sects hostile to the state'). He began to read the translation: "All organizations, clubs, associations, circles, and the like, without exception, will be liquidated; existing materials, such as address lists, files, correspondence, equipment... will be confiscated... Persons initiated into secret teachings... are subject to arrest."

They were also ordered to be sent to concentration camps.

Wasn't something similar happening now in Tomsk? Searches. Confiscation of literature. Lists of community members demanded by the prosecutor's office. Threats to shut down the organization.

"History repeats itself," said Mikhail. "Only instead of the Gestapo, we have Center E, and instead of concentration camps, we have courts for now. But the vector is the same."

"And the justification is the same," added Radziv. "Hitler justified repression by protecting the German people. Dvorkin justifies it by protecting 'traditional values'. But the methods... The methods are identical."

The Nazi regime (Germany, its allies, and collaborators) killed about six million Jews. Tens of thousands of political opponents and dissidents were killed; some religious minorities, which the regime branded as "sects," were also subjected to repression. The language of "fighting sects" is convenient: it quickly turns people into a "threat" and violence into a "sanitary measure."

"They're always in the shadows," Dmitry said thoughtfully. "Dvorkin doesn't wear a uniform. He wears a professor's jacket. He doesn't give orders to shoot people. He just writes 'expert opinions'. But those opinions kill people."

Rajiv nodded.

"It's called 'murder by proxy.' They create an atmosphere of hatred, and others do the dirty work. Police officers, judges, and sometimes just citizens who have been brainwashed by propaganda. Remember the case when a fanatic attacked a temple? He shouted the same words that anti-cultists said.

The journalist moved on to the next part of his investigation. He called it "The Roman Formula." Divide and conquer.

"Why do they need this?" he asked himself. "Why spend so much energy fighting peaceful yogis or readers of the Vedas?

"They want a monopoly," Dmitry realized. "A monopoly on thought. If you can make people hate their neighbor for praying differently, you can make them do anything."

"Yes," Rajiv confirmed. "It's training. Rehearsing the mechanism of submission. Today they are training on you. Tomorrow they will apply these methods to the whole of society."

Rajeev showed a photo taken at one of the RACIRS conferences. In it, priests and "cult experts" sat next to people in uniform.

In Germany, the Apologetic Center worked closely with the Gestapo. In Russia, leaders of the anti-cult movement similarly cooperate with the Ministry of Internal Affairs and special services, give lectures to the military, and provide them with materials and lists of "undesirable" persons.

"They have infiltrated the state," Mikhail stated. "They give lectures at the academies of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. They teach future officers that anyone who thinks differently is an enemy. They infect the state with the virus of Nazism from within."

Dmitry looked at the diagram. RACIRS — Ministry of Justice — Ministry of Internal Affairs — FSB. A web that entangled the country. And at the center of this web sat a man who had essentially created his own sect. A sect of fighters against sects.

"Listen to what the experts are writing," Radziv read from an analysis of Dvorkin's book Sectology. "The communicative goal of the book is to convince the reader of the absolute danger and depravity of the religions described... to form a lasting feeling of hatred, fear, and contempt towards them and their followers... Such rhetoric reproduces elements of discriminatory ideology and, in essence, corresponds to the characteristics of Nazi propaganda."

"And our experts use this book, 'Sectology,' as a scientific source in court!" Dmitry exclaimed indignantly.

It was a frightening discovery. The trial in Tomsk was no longer a local incident. It had turned into a battlefield between humanism and resurgent fascism. Fascism that had replaced the swastika with the logo of the "Center for Religious Studies," but retained its cannibalistic essence.

Rajiv walked over to the window. The blizzard outside had intensified. The city slept, unaware that a boil was festering in its bowels, capable of poisoning the entire country. "You know what's most cynical?" he asked, looking at the snow. "They accuse you of being agents of the West. But they themselves use Western methods. They accuse you of totalitarianism, but they themselves have built a totalitarian structure. It's a mirror. A crooked, black mirror."

He returned to the table and picked up the document about the "Yellow Stars."

"In Germany, Jews were forbidden to work as doctors and teachers. Dvorkin promotes the idea that Jehovah's Witnesses or Hare

Krishnas cannot live fully in society, work as doctors, or in schools or administrations.

"They tried to fire my wife from school," Dmitry said quietly. "The principal said, 'We don't need problems with sectarians.' It's already working. The yellow stars are already on us."

Mikhail, who had been silent all this time, suddenly stood up abruptly.

"This changes our defense strategy," he said firmly. "We can no longer simply refute the expert opinion. We must declare in court that the ideology of the prosecution is extremism. That the activities of Dvorkin and RACIRS fall under the definition of incitement to hatred."

"The judge won't let us do that," Dmitry objected.

"We have to try," insisted the lawyer. "We have to put it on record. Let it go down in history. Let our descendants see that we called things by their proper names."

Rajiv nodded. He was already writing the headline for his next article in his head: "The Fourth Reich Begins in Siberia."

"I'll publish it," he promised. "I'll show the world this connection. Künnet — Dvorkin. The Gestapo — Center E. The world must know that Nazism did not die in 1945. It simply went underground, changed its name, and put on the mask of a benefactor. But in essence, modern global anti-cultism is a hidden revival of Nazism, only in a more advanced and cruel form.

Dmitry felt strange. The fear was gone. It was replaced by cold pragmatism. He realized that his enemy was not the prosecutor, not the half-baked expert, and not even Dvorkin as a person. His enemy was an eternal evil that took on a new form in every century. The Inquisition, Nazism, anti-cultism — these were the heads of the same hydra.

"They want us to feel guilty," said Dmitry. "So that we make excuses. But we are not guilty. Those who sow this hatred are guilty." "The voice of your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground," Rajiv quoted the Bible. "They have forgotten this commandment. They think they can judge God. But in fact, they are judging themselves."

They didn't sleep that night. They pored over the archives, finding more and more evidence. Lists of "undesirable organizations" that grew like yeast. "De-programming" techniques that resembled torture manuals. Evidence of how anti-cultists destroyed families by turning children against their parents.

Towards morning, Radziv found a document that put an end to their research. It was an analysis of Dvorkin's activities by independent experts.

"There is clearly a real totalitarian cult professing Nazism, with its own leader... As a result, for many years, Dvorkin's followers, Nazi cultists, have been terrorizing the Russian people."

"Here it is, the verdict," said Radziv, throwing the sheet of paper on the table. "A real verdict for the accusers. They created a sect to fight sects. They became what they promised to fight."

Dmitry walked over to the window. Dawn had painted the sky a dirty gray. The city was waking up. People were going to work, taking their children to kindergarten. They didn't know that they were living in a laboratory where a monstrous experiment was being conducted to breed a new breed of people — people devoid of conscience and compassion, ready to tear apart anyone the "expert" pointed at on command.

But now Dmitry knew about it. And this knowledge was a heavy burden.

"We have to tell people about this," he said. "Not just in court. Everywhere."

"We will tell them," Rajiv promised. "But be prepared, Dima. Lies do not forgive when their mask is torn off. When you call a Nazi a Nazi, he stops pretending to be a gentleman."

Dmitry looked at his Bhagavad Gita lying on the nightstand. A book that had survived for millennia. A book that had seen empires crumble to dust. It would survive this too. But would people survive?

"You know," he said, putting on his coat. "In the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna says to Arjuna, 'Fight without distinguishing between victory and defeat.' Now I understand what that means. We are not fighting for a book. We are fighting to remain human in a world that wants to turn us into beasts."

They left the hotel. The cold wind hit their faces, bringing tears to their eyes. But these were tears of purification. They looked into the abyss, and the abyss looked back at them. But they did not flinch.

A new day of judgment lay ahead.

But Dmitry did not yet know that knowing the truth does not free one from pain. And that the machine they had exposed had already gained momentum. The wheels of history had already begun to turn, and soon they would demand new blood.

Meanwhile, the city went about its usual business, unaware of the poisonous seeds sprouting in its streets, sown by people confident in their right to decide who should live and who should be erased from the rolls of humanity.

Chapter 13: On the Brink

The silence in Dmitry's apartment was no longer cozy. Before, before the trial, silence meant peace after a day's work, time for reading or quiet conversation with his wife. Now it rang with tension, filled with phantom sounds: the squeak of brakes in the courtyard, heavy footsteps on the staircase, a sharp, demanding ring at the door.

A sports bag stood neatly leaning against the shoe rack by the front door. Inside were a change of underwear, a toothbrush, soap, warm socks, and several packs of dry biscuits. Dmitry had packed it two weeks ago when his lawyer, Mikhail, looked away and said that Article 282 carried not only fines but also real prison terms.

Dmitry's wife, Elena, had aged several years during that time. Her face had become gaunt, with dark circles under her eyes. She had stopped sleeping. Every night, Dmitry heard her tossing and turning, sighing, and then going to the kitchen to drink valerian. The smell of medicinal herbs mixed with the smell of fear became the new aroma of their home.

"Do you think they'll come today?" she asked at breakfast. Her voice was dull, devoid of intonation. Dmitry looked at her over his teacup. His hands were shaking, and he gripped the cup tighter to hide it.

"No, Lena. The trial is still ongoing. Until there is a decision, they have no right."

"Right..." She smiled bitterly. "What about the search? What about the confiscation of books? Did they have the right? Dima, they do whatever they want. We're not people to them. We're 'figures.'"

Dmitry didn't know how to respond. He was an engineer, accustomed to working with the laws of physics, which could not be broken or circumvented with bribes. But the laws they were now facing were fluid, like mercury, and poisonous.

He saw how this poison was seeping into their lives. Last week, Elena was summoned to the principal's office at the school where she worked as a primary school teacher. The conversation was brief. "The parents are concerned," said the principal, averting her eyes. "They say your husband is in a cult. They say it's contagious. Elena Sergeevna, you are a wonderful teacher, but... please understand us. The school doesn't need scandals."

She wasn't fired. Not yet. But she was asked to take unpaid leave. "Until things calm down." It was social death. Isolation.

In the evening, people gathered at the community house. The atmosphere was like a wake, even though no one had died. People sat quietly, speaking in hushed tones. The usual smiles disappeared, replaced by wary glances.

There was only one question on the agenda: what to do next?

"We need to close the temple," said an elderly man, Viktor Petrovich, a former military man. "Temporarily. Take down the sign, remove the books. Stop gathering in large groups. We are provoking them."

"And where will we go?" objected Andrei, a history student. He looked exhausted, his jeans hanging loosely on him. "Underground?

Into the catacombs? Viktor Petrovich, we are not criminals. If we hide, we will confirm their delusions about a 'secret organization.'"

"What if they put us in jail? You don't care about ruining your life, kid, you're young and passionate. But I have grandchildren. The neighbors are already giving us dirty looks, they've stopped saying hello. Yesterday, someone wrote 'Sect' on the door of our building. I'm ashamed to go outside!"

A commotion arose in the hall. Fear, which had been building up for months, was looking for an outlet. People who had been chanting mantras and distributing food to the needy for years now looked at each other with suspicion. Some suggested compromising with the anti-cultists. Some demanded that letters be written to the president. Some just cried.

Dmitry looked at these faces and understood: the system's goal had almost been achieved. Even without a court verdict.

The mechanism set in motion by Dvorkin and his followers worked flawlessly. It did not strike at books. It struck at the bonds between people. The psychological pressure that the prosecution experts loved to talk about did not actually come from the "guru," but from the anti-cult network.

Rajiv, sitting in the corner with his notebook, watched what was happening with professional detachment, behind which lay deep pain. He saw before him a classic example of what sociologists call "stigmatization."

He recalled the materials he had studied the day before. Stephen Hassen and other anti-cult ideologues claimed that members of

"cults" were deprived of their free will, that they were puppets. But here, in this room, Rajiv saw the opposite. He saw people desperately trying to preserve their free will under tremendous pressure.

"Listen," Rajiv stood up. Everyone fell silent, turning to the foreigner. "I read the indictment. Dvorkin writes that cults use 'mutual psychological pressure' to keep people in. But look at yourselves. Who is pressuring you? Your God? Your book? Or the prosecutor and the newspapers?"

Andrei raised his head.

"The newspapers," he said quietly. "They write that we are zombies. That we are dangerous. At the university, a philosophy professor who used to give me A's cited us as an example of a 'destructive cult' in his lecture yesterday. He quoted the expert opinion. He looked at me and said that people like us have destroyed personalities.

Andrei clenched his fists.

"I sat there and thought: I'm here. I'm alive. I'm the same Andrei I was a year ago. I love history, I love Russia. Why have I suddenly become an enemy?"

"Because it's convenient for them," Dmitry replied. He stepped into the center of the circle. "Friends, listen. Viktor Petrovich is right, everyone is afraid. I have a bag at home with things for prison. My wife is taking pills by the handful. But let's think about it: if we run away now, if we hide our books, will we stop being afraid?

The silence became thick.

"No," Dmitry continued. "The fear will remain. Only shame will be added to it. We will betray what gave us the strength to live. The Bhagavad Gita teaches that fear is born of attachment to the temporary. They can take away our building. They can take away our jobs. They can even take away our freedom. But they cannot take away our faith unless we give it up ourselves.

"That's easy to say," sobbed the woman in the front row. "But how can we live? How can we look people in the eye when they call us 'tumors'?

That was the worst part. Dehumanization. The terms used by experts and journalists — "infection," "metastasis," "biorobots" — did their . Society began to perceive believers not as neighbors, but as a problem that needed to be eliminated. A sanitary problem.

Rajiv saw how this technology worked. It was described in propaganda textbooks. First, you create an image of an enemy devoid of human traits. Then you accuse them of all sins. And then society itself begins to demand retribution, considering it an act of self-defense.

"We are not a tumor," Dmitry said firmly. "We are people. And we will remain people, no matter what they call us. That is our victory. Not in court, but here and now."

After the meeting, Dmitry and Rajiv went out onto the porch. The frosty air burned their lungs, but it was a pleasant feeling — a feeling of reality.

"They're on the edge, Dima," Rajiv said, lighting a cigarette. "I can see it. People are breaking down. That woman who was crying is

having a nervous breakdown. Viktor Petrovich is on the verge of a heart attack."

"I know," Dmitry nodded. "Stress kills faster than bullets."

"That's the goal," the journalist said harshly. "In anti-cultist documents, it's called 'neutralization.' They don't necessarily have to put everyone in prison. It's enough to create unbearable conditions. Destroy their reputation, take away their jobs, intimidate their families. People will break down or leave on their own.

Rajiv took out a tape recorder.

"I spoke with the emergency doctor today. He visited one of your families. The child has nervous asthma. The father has hypertension. The doctor said something interesting: 'It feels like they are living in a war zone.

"We do," Dmitry replied. "Only the bombs fall silently."

Dmitry remembered his nightmare from that morning. He dreamed that he opened the Gita, but the pages were blank. White sheets. As if the text had gotten scared and run away.

"You know, Rajiv, the hardest thing isn't the trial. The hardest thing is coming home and seeing my wife's eyes. She doesn't believe in Krishna the way I do. She just loves me. And she suffers because of me. That feeling... it eats away at me."

"Dvorkin would say that this is proof of the destructiveness of the sect," Rajiv smiled bitterly. "That the sect destroys families."

"Yes. But he's the one destroying the family. With his own hands. With his articles. With his experts. It's a topsy-turvy world. The

executioner accuses the victim of staining his axe with blood.

The next day, Andrei came to the university. He walked down the corridor, feeling eyes on him. The whispering behind his back was almost physically palpable.

"Look, it's him..." "They say they drink blood..."

"No, just drugs..."

"Stay away, or he'll hypnotize you."

Andrei entered the lecture hall and sat down in his usual seat by the window. There were two empty chairs next to him. His friends, Kostya and Lesha, used to sit there. Now they were sitting in another row. When Andrei greeted them, Kostya pretended not to notice, and Lesha muttered something indistinct and buried his head in his phone.

It was loneliness in a crowd. A vacuum.

During the break, the class president approached him.

"Listen, Andrey," he said, looking at the floor. "Here's the thing. The dean's office asked for a list of students to be expelled. Well, for failing grades and stuff.

"I don't have any debts," Andrei tensed up.

"I know. But... they hinted at it. They said that the presence of students who are members of extremist organizations damages the university's rating. Would you... pick up the documents yourself? Before it starts."

Andrei looked at the class president. He was a normal guy; they played soccer together.

"I'm not a member of an extremist organization," Andrei said clearly. "The court hasn't made a decision yet. And even if it does, I'm reading a book. Reading books isn't prohibited by the Constitution."

"Forget about the Constitution," the head of the student council frowned. "You understand how it works. There's a signal. There's an opinion. They won't let you finish your studies. Why do you need a 'wolf ticket'? Leave quietly, transfer somewhere else.

"Leave quietly." That's what they wanted. For them to disappear. To vanish. To stop being a thorn in their side with their very existence.

Andrei left the university. He wanted to scream. Out of helplessness, out of resentment. He loved history, he wanted to become a scholar. And now he was being thrown out of life just because someone in Moscow didn't like the book in his backpack.

He took out his phone and called Dmitry.

"Dima, I can't take it anymore. They're pressuring me from all sides."

"Come to the temple," Dmitry's voice was calm. "Just come."

In the evening, the temple was not very crowded, but those who had come prayed with a kind of desperate fervor. Dmitry sat at the altar and read aloud. He chose the chapter on fearlessness.

"He who sees inaction in action and action in inaction is the most intelligent among men..."

The words of ancient Sanskrit, translated into Russian, sounded in the silence of the hall like a spell against the madness of the outside world. People closed their eyes and swayed in time. For those half an hour, there were no courts, no prosecutors, no experts. There was only sound.

Rajiv stood at the entrance and watched. He saw the wrinkles on people's faces smooth out. He saw the tension leave their shoulders. It was not "zombification," as the experts wrote in their report. It was therapy. The only way to preserve sanity in conditions of total persecution.

He noticed Elena, Dmitry's wife. She had come for the first time in a long time. She didn't sing, she just sat in the corner with her arms wrapped around her knees. But she was there. Next to her husband.

When the service was over, Viktor Petrovich approached Dmitry. The old man looked better than yesterday.

"Forgive me, Dima," he said. "I lost my temper yesterday. I'm getting old, my nerves are shot."

"It's all right, Viktor Petrovich. It's hard for everyone."

"Here's what I've been thinking," the old man straightened up, and his military bearing reappeared. "I didn't hide in Afghanistan. And I'm not going to hide here. Let them come. Let them search. All I have at home is Gita and my mother's icons. Let them look. I have nothing to hide."

Dmitry hugged him. It was a turning point. The fear hadn't disappeared, but it was no longer paralyzing. It had transformed into

stubbornness. The very Russian stubbornness that had broken many conquerors.

"We will stand our ground," said Andrei, approaching them. "I will not take my documents. Let them expel me. Let them write the order. I will go to court. I will prove that they are violating the law on education. I will not let them make me an outcast."

Rajiv looked at them and understood: the system had miscalculated. It had pushed too hard. Instead of crushing them, it had compressed these different people — an engineer, a student, a pensioner — into a monolith.

But he also understood that the resources of the human psyche are not limitless.

Late in the evening, when everyone had left, Dmitry remained alone. He went to the window. A car was standing on the street, illuminated by a streetlight. It was a tinted Lada with no license plates. It had been standing there for several days.

Dmitry knew that there were people sitting in it, watching their every move. People who wrote reports. People for whom he was a target.

His phone rang. The number was hidden.

"Dmitry Anatolyevich?" The voice on the line was unfamiliar, insinuating.

"Yes?"

"Good evening. This is a friend. I wanted to warn you. Tomorrow there will be a decision. Not a court decision, another kind. From above. Get ready. It will be tough."

The line went dead.

Dmitry slowly lowered his hand with the phone. "It's going to be tough." What does that mean? Arrests? A raid? Or something else they can't even imagine?

He felt his heart skip a beat.

Dmitry looked at the altar. The flame of the lamp flickered in the draft.

"Krishna," he whispered. "Do something. We can't do it ourselves anymore. We're on the brink."

He didn't know that at that very moment, thousands of kilometers from Tomsk, a phone rang in the office of a high-ranking diplomat. And that call was about to change everything. But for now, night reigned in the snow-covered Siberian city, and a small community of people, guilty only of reading the wrong book, was preparing to meet what might be their last dawn of freedom.

Dmitry picked up the bag standing by the door and checked the zipper. Everything was ready. He was ready. But inside, deep in his soul, a thin string of hope rang out that this world had not yet completely gone mad.

The call from the "well-wisher" echoed in his head. Tomorrow. Everything would be decided tomorrow.

Chapter 14: Diplomatic Thunder

That morning, Tomsk woke up under its usual leaden sky, but the air in the city had changed. It had nothing to do with the weather or atmospheric pressure. The change was invisible but palpable, as if somewhere deep underground tectonic plates had shifted, and the vibration from this shift had passed through the foundations of buildings, reaching offices where only yesterday there had been a sleepy confidence in their own impunity.

Rajiv sat in front of his laptop, his face lit by the flickering screen. This time, he wasn't reading legal documents or analyzing RACIRS connection diagrams. He was watching a live broadcast from New Delhi.

There, thousands of kilometers away from snow-covered Siberia, summer was in full swing. But the heat did not come from the sun. The screen flashed images that seemed surreal to anyone familiar with the history of relations between the two countries. People in the streets of the Indian capital were burning effigies. They carried posters with slogans written in Hindi and English. And on these posters was one word that united the crowd: "Gita."

"Dima," Rajiv called quietly into the phone. "Turn on the news. Not the local news. I'll send you the link."

Dmitry, who was in the kitchen with a cup of coffee at that moment, felt his heart skip a beat. "What happened? Have we been declared terrorists?"

"No," the journalist's voice trembled with tension. "You've been declared martyrs. And Russia has been declared a country that has essentially declared war on freedom of religion."

Events unfolded with frightening speed. What began as a local initiative by the Tomsk prosecutor's office, incited by "Orthodox activists" and half-baked experts, suddenly spread beyond the region. The butterfly effect worked flawlessly: the flutter of a wing in a judge's office in Siberia caused a hurricane in Indian society.

India's largest television network interrupted its broadcast for a special news report. The presenters, their faces filled with alarm, reported that the unthinkable was happening in Russia, a country that India had always considered its strategic partner and friend. The sacred book of Hinduism, a text that had shaped generations, a text that Gandhi had quoted in the struggle for independence, was being equated with extremist literature.

Dmitry stared at the tablet screen, the letters blurring before his eyes.

"Outrage." "Political scandal." "Insult to the feelings of a billion believers."

Search engines returned numerous links and reports in a single morning. The world, which yesterday did not know about the existence of the Tomsk District Court, was now following every move of this trial with rapt attention.

But the climax came an hour later.

Rajiv sent Dmitry a link to a broadcast from the Indian Parliament. The Lok Sabha, the lower house and heart of Indian democracy, had

stopped its work. Members of Parliament, forgetting their party differences, demanded an answer.

"We will not tolerate this insult!" thundered a voice from the podium. "The Bhagavad Gita is not just a book. It is our identity!"

Dmitry saw the deputies waving the very book that was lying in his "alarm case." The very book that experts from Kemerovo had called "extremist."

The irony was deadly. The experts claimed that the book incited hatred. And now, thanks to their own actions, hatred was indeed flaring up. But not on religious grounds, but on inter-state grounds. For the first time in the history of Russian-Indian relations, a chanting crowd gathered outside the Russian embassy in Delhi.

"They got what they wanted," Mikhail said when they met in the office two hours later. The lawyer looked stunned. "Dvorkin and his team wanted to protect Russia from 'foreign influence'. In the end, they exposed Russia to an attack the likes of which it hadn't seen since the Cold War.

In Moscow, in a high-rise building on Smolenskaya Square, the phones were ringing off the hook. Diplomats watched the news reports with horror.

No one in the Foreign Ministry had read the "Comprehensive Psychological and Linguistic Assessment." For them, it was a minor regional squabble. But now that squabble threatened contracts worth billions of dollars. And all of this strategic partnership was hanging by a thread because of the ambitions of a few "sectologists" and the zeal of one prosecutor.

The Indian ambassador to Russia, a reserved and diplomatic man, made a statement that sounded like a slap in the face to the entire Russian law enforcement system. He called what was happening "absurd."

"This is unacceptable," news agencies quoted him as saying. "To judge sacred scripture is to judge the culture of an entire people. We hope that common sense will prevail."

The ambassador made it clear that what was happening in Tomsk had nothing to do with law or logic. It was madness.

Reading this news, Rajiv felt a strange mixture of triumph and fear.

"We woke the dragon, Dima," he said, looking out the window at the snow-covered street. "We wanted to attract attention, but we didn't expect this scale."

"What will happen now?" asked Dmitry. "Will they back down?"

"The system doesn't know how to back down," Rajiv shook his head. "It only knows how to oppress. But now it's not just the fate of your community that's at stake. The Kremlin's reputation is at stake."

The corridors of the Tomsk court were unusually quiet that day. The bailiffs' arrogance had disappeared. The prosecutor, who used to enter the courtroom with an air of authority, now tried not to raise her eyes. She felt that it was not just a group of believers with lawyers standing behind her. Behind them now stood a billion people.

The judge looked tired and tense. She, an ordinary district judge accustomed to dealing with cases of theft and domestic disputes, suddenly had to decide on a matter of geopolitical significance. On

her desk lay the same case file, the same absurd expert reports, but now they weighed a ton.

Mikhail stood up to make a statement.

"Your Honor," his voice was firm. "We request that the official response of the Indian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the ambassador's statement be added to the case file. We also draw the court's attention to the fact that this trial is directly damaging to the international prestige of the Russian Federation."

The prosecutor tried to object, but her voice was weak.

"This is irrelevant to the case... We are considering the text..."

"It is directly relevant!" Mikhail interrupted, breaking protocol.

"Experts claim that the book is socially dangerous. But the facts say otherwise: it is this trial itself that is socially dangerous. It is this trial, not the book, that brought people out onto the streets of Delhi. It is this trial, not the book, that forced the Indian parliament to stop working.

The judge tapped her pen on the table. She did not interrupt the lawyer. She listened.

At that moment, it became clear how pathetic and insignificant the prosecution's arguments looked against the backdrop of global reality. "Psychological violence," "semantic inductors," "the negative connotation of the word 'fool'" — all these pseudoscientific constructs, built by experts from the pedagogical institute, crumbled to dust when confronted with living history and culture.

Dmitry looked at the prosecutor and felt pity for the first time. She was a pawn thrown into battle by the generals of the ideological war, and now that the situation had spiraled out of control, the generals were hiding in the bushes.

Where was Alexander Dvorkin now? Where were the RACIRS activists who had shouted so loudly about "spiritual security"? They were silent. None of them came out to the press to explain to the Indian ambassador why his faith was "extremism." They left it to the woman in the blue uniform in a distant Siberian city to take the heat.

In the evening, Rajiv received a letter from his colleague in Brussels.

"You won't believe it, but a movement has started here too. European human rights activists are asking questions. The topic of 'expert terror' in Russia is reaching the European Parliament. Your article about Dvorkin's ties to European structures hit the mark. Now it will be more difficult for them to pretend that this is 'Russia's internal affair.'"

Raviv showed the letter to Dmitry.

"See? The light is working."

"But the trial isn't over yet," Dmitry reminded him. "There's no decision."

"The decision has already been made," Rajiv said confidently. "Not in this courtroom. It has been made by reality. They can't ban a book that India is ready to sever diplomatic relations over. That would be political suicide."

However, Dmitry, who had lived in Russia all his life, knew that logic did not always work here. Sometimes, when cornered, the system would lash out simply out of fear.

"You know what I'm thinking about?" he asked. "About those people who wrote denunciations. About those who came to our homes with search warrants. They sincerely considered themselves patriots. They thought they were saving Russia. But in reality, they nearly destroyed its foreign policy."

"It's the paradox of fanaticism," Rajiv replied. "Fanatics always destroy what they are trying to protect. They wanted so badly to 'cleanse' Russia of dissent that they made it a laughing stock in front of the whole world."

The night before the final hearing was strange. Dmitry's phone, which had previously been silent or spewing threats, was now ringing off the hook with calls from journalists. CNN, BBC, Al Jazeera — they all wanted a comment from the "simple Siberian engineer" who had found himself at the center of an international storm.

Dmitry responded with monosyllables. He was tired. He didn't want to be a news hero. He just wanted to read his book and build houses.

At that time, in Moscow, in the high offices, tough conversations were taking place. Officials responsible for relations with religious organizations were trying to figure out how to get out of the situation while saving face. Admit a mistake? That would mean admitting that the experts were incompetent. Continue to apply pressure? That would mean losing India.

A zugzwang. Any move would worsen their position.

And the culprits of this zugzwang were the very same "experts" who were now sitting quietly, keeping a low profile. The system built by Dvorkin had failed. It was designed to suppress the weak and defenseless. It was not designed for an entire power to stand up for the "sectarians."

Rajiv finished writing his article. He titled the chapter "Diplomatic Thunder."

"Today we saw the limits of 'expert terror'. Lies can work in the silence of offices. They can work within the confines of a single city. But when lies are brought to light on the international stage, they become toxic for the liars themselves. The Tomsk court has become a litmus test. It has shown that in the 21st century, you cannot simply take it upon yourself to outlaw part of world culture under the guise of bogus expert opinions."

He sent the text to the editor and closed his laptop.

Tomorrow the decision would be made. Rajiv knew it would be a compromise. The authorities could not afford a complete failure, but a victory for the prosecution was impossible. Most likely, they would try to drag the case out.

But the mechanism had already been broken. The myth of the "scientific nature" of religious studies expertise had been destroyed.

Dmitry stood by the window. Snow was falling on the city, hiding the dirt and grayness. Somewhere out there, in the darkness, people were sleeping, who would wake up tomorrow and learn that their city had become the center of world politics.

Today, India had shown an example of greatness. It did not respond to hatred with hatred. It responded with dignity. But the anxiety did not go away. Dmitry understood: the diplomatic thunder would rumble, the ambassadors would shake hands, contracts would be signed. And they — he, his wife, Andrei, Viktor Petrovich — would remain here. In a city where the word "Sect" was still written on the walls. With neighbors who still believed the newspapers. With a prosecutor who would harbor resentment for her humiliation.

Big politics would save the book. But who would save people from the hatred that had already been sown and had begun to sprout?

The door to the room creaked softly. Elena entered.

"Dima," she whispered. "The school principal called me."

Dmitry tensed up.

"What did she say? Is she firing you?"

"No. She said... she said, 'Elena Sergeevna, come back to work. It seems we got carried away.'"

Dmitry exhaled. It was the first sign of hope. His fear began to recede. Not because people had suddenly seen the light, but because they sensed that the wind had changed. And weather vanes always turn with the wind.

"You see," he said, hugging his wife. "Thunder is scary, but it doesn't always bring rain to wash away the dirt.

But he knew that the dirt had penetrated deeply. And to wash it away completely, one diplomatic rain would not be enough.

Tomorrow, the court will announce its decision. And that will be the end of the chapter, but not the end of the book. Because the authors of this farce—the people from RACIRS, the people from the Expert Council—have not gone anywhere. They have simply gone into hiding, waiting for the storm to pass, so that when the thunder subsides, they can start weaving their web again.

But that will be tomorrow. Today, the echo of distant Indian drums hung over Tomsk, proclaiming that the truth cannot be locked away in a criminal case file, even if it bears the stamp "Top Secret."

Chapter 15: Conviction Without Evidence

December 28, 2011. Tomsk. The morning was as gray and bitter as all the previous days of this endless December. But in the corridors of the court, the air was different. It was electrified.

Dmitry stood by the window, looking out at the snow-covered street. Below, at the entrance to the courthouse, people had gathered again with placards.

Rajeev stood next to Dmitry. The Indian journalist looked haggard. His business trip had dragged on, turning from a report on a curiosity into a chronicle of an ideological war.

"Today it will all end, Dima," he said quietly. "One way or another."

"The question is how," Dmitry replied, without looking away from the window. "Prison or a respite."

They were not allowed into the courtroom immediately. The bailiffs searched their bags with particular thoroughness, as if looking for the very "extremist sedition" in the personal belongings of the lawyers and listeners that they had been unable to find in the text of the book.

When everyone had taken their seats, Dmitry looked at the judge's table. There were two stacks of papers on it. One was a thin, lonely folder of the prosecution's case, based on dozens of pages of the

"Comprehensive Psychological and Linguistic Report" from Kemerovo. The other was a massive, imposing mountain of defense documents: reviews by professors from Moscow State University, the Russian Academy of Sciences, and the Russian State University for the Humanities, as well as an alternative expert opinion from Barnaul.

It was a vivid illustration of the battle: bureaucratic red tape versus academic science.

"All rise, court is in session!"

The judge entered the courtroom briskly. Her face did not wear its usual mask of indifference. Over the past few days, she seemed to have realized that she had become a hostage in someone else's game. A game in which the bets were made in the offices of RACIRS and the Ministry of Justice, but it was she, an ordinary district judge, who had to pay with her reputation.

The hearing began with an attack by the defense. Mikhail, the community's lawyer, decided not to give the prosecutor a chance to recover. He picked up the text of the Kemerovo expert report, the very document that was supposed to be the death sentence for the book.

"Your Honor," Mikhail began, his voice ringing out in the silence of the courtroom. "We have talked a lot about bias. But let's look at the facts. We have before us a document that the prosecution calls a scientific work. However, even within this 'work' there is no unity.

He opened the page with the conclusions.

"Please note: a religious scholar, a member of the expert commission, writes in black and white: 'There is no extremism in the book.' This is the conclusion of an expert brought in by the investigation itself! But the prosecution ignores the opinion of the religious scholar and bases its case on the conclusions of a linguist and a psychologist.

Mikhail paused, allowing his words to sink in.

"And now about the linguist and psychologist. We analyzed their texts. Their conclusions coincide in places, literally word for word. This is not scientific work, Your Honor. This is copy-paste. This is an imitation of activity.

The prosecutor sat with her head down. She had nothing to say in response. She knew the lawyer was right. She knew that the expert opinion was "stitched together with white thread." But she had orders.

"Moreover," Mikhail continued, taking out the next document, "we see that the experts use wording that has no legal meaning. They write that the book contains statements that are offensive 'to an undefined group of persons'. Your Honor, what is an 'undefined group of people'? How can you offend someone you can't define? This is legal nonsense.

Dmitry listened and remembered the faces of these experts. Their shifty eyes, their inability to explain their own terms. They wrote about "mind manipulation," but when asked to define it, they were at a loss. In the text of the expert report , they were forced to

acknowledge the "extreme ambiguity of the expression 'mind manipulation,'" but they used it anyway.

The defense moved on to heavy artillery. A review by a Doctor of Philology from the Vinogradov Russian Language Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences was placed on the judge's desk.

"Leading scientists of the country, academicians, and professors assert that the conclusions of the Kemerovo experts are not justified. They contradict scientific methodology. This is not an expert opinion. It is an ideological pamphlet."

The judge leafed through the pages. She saw a letter from Tomsk State University that had arrived earlier. In it, the university administration officially stated that it had not authorized its employees to conduct an expert analysis at the first request. It was a stab in the back for the prosecution from the education system itself. Even the university did not want to get involved in this process.

"Your Honor," the second lawyer interjected. "We have a conclusion from the Linguistic Expert and Consulting Center of the city of Barnaul. Doctors of Science, professors. One hundred and twenty pages of detailed analysis. Their conclusion is unequivocal: there are no signs of extremism. There are no calls for violence."

The prosecutor tried to retort weakly: "But it talks about restricting women's freedom... About the superiority of faith..."

"Every religion has postulates about rules of behavior and the truth of its path," Mikhail parried.

"If we start judging people for that, we'll have to ban the Bible, the Koran, and the Torah. Are you ready to set such a precedent?"

Silence hung in the courtroom. The question was rhetorical, but everyone knew the answer. Setting such a precedent would mean the end of religious peace in Russia. And, judging by India's reaction, the end of foreign policy stability as well.

The judge announced a recess to deliver the verdict.

Those hours of waiting were the hardest. Dmitry, Rajiv, and Mikhail went out into the corridor. They didn't speak. Words had run out. All that remained was to wait for the hammer blow that would either shatter their lives or break the chains of absurdity.

Rajeev checked the news on his phone. "India never sleeps," he whispered to Dmitry. "It's evening there now, but people are waiting."

Finally, the courtroom door opened. The clerk invited everyone inside.

The judge entered and stood behind the podium. She looked tired but determined. She held a sheet of paper in her hands that weighed more than all the volumes of the criminal case.

"In the name of the Russian Federation..."

Dmitry clenched his fists so tightly that his knuckles turned white. His heart was beating somewhere in his throat.

"...the court has decided to deny the request of the Tomsk City Prosecutor's Office to recognize the book Bhagavad-gita As It Is as extremist material."

The courtroom exhaled. It was not just a sigh of relief. It was the sound of air escaping from the punctured tire of a huge, terrifying

machine.

The court found no grounds for recognizing the book as extremist literature... The book is one of the interpretations of the sacred Hindu scripture... The text does not contain any statements of an inciting nature, calls for hostile or violent actions...

Dmitry felt his legs give way. He sank down onto the bench. Elena, sitting next to him, began to cry. Quietly, silently, covering her face with her hands.

It was a victory. An unconditional, clear victory. The court recognized what was obvious to any sane person: faith cannot be judged by the articles of the Criminal Code. A call for love and self-knowledge cannot be called extremism.

But when the first wave of euphoria subsided, Dmitry looked at the prosecutor.

The woman in the blue uniform did not look crushed. She was dissatisfied, irritated, but not frightened. She gathered her papers with the businesslike air of someone who had lost a game but not the tournament.

"We will appeal," she told reporters as she walked past the cameras. "We consider the decision unfounded."

Rajiv approached Dmitry. There was no triumph in his eyes.

"Did you hear?" he asked.

"I heard. They won't let it go."

"That's not the point, Dima. Look at the experts."

Dmitry shifted his gaze to the corner of the room where the prosecution representatives were sitting. The very people who wrote the false conclusion. The ones who copied texts from Dvorkin's websites. The ones who brought the country to the brink of a diplomatic rift.

They calmly put on their coats. No one handcuffed them for giving false testimony. No one handed them a summons for inciting interreligious strife. No one accused them of fraud or incompetence.

"They're leaving," Rajiv said, his voice tinged with bitterness. "They committed a crime against truth, against science, against people. And they're just going home for dinner.

It was the terrible revelation of the day. The mechanism that had created this case remained intact. The court had saved the book, but it had not condemned the system that had tried to destroy it.

The false experts remained experts. RACIRS remained a respected organization.

"Is this a Pyrrhic victory?" Dmitry asked.

"No," replied Mikhail, approaching them. "It's a victory in a battle during a retreat. We repelled the attack. We saved the shrine. But the enemy is not defeated. It is simply regrouping."

They left the courthouse. It was already dark outside. Snow was falling in large flakes, covering the city with a white blanket. People with posters greeted them with shouts of joy. Some were handing out sweets. Some were singing.

Dmitry looked at these happy faces and tried to smile. He should have been happy. He would not be imprisoned. The book would not be burned. His wife would be able to return to school.

But deep down inside, there was a thorn in his side. He knew that tomorrow Maxim Stepanenko would write nasty things on his website again. He knew that the prosecutor's office would file an appeal. He knew that somewhere in Moscow, Dvorkin was already coming up with a new plan to call black white.

Radziv took out his voice recorder to record his thoughts while they were still fresh.

December 28, 2011. Tomsk. The court rejected the prosecutor's appeal. Common sense prevailed. But this triumph has a bitter aftertaste. We saw how easy it is to fabricate a case out of thin air. We saw how "expertise" can be turned into a weapon of terror. And most importantly, we saw that this weapon has no safety catch. The only thing that stopped them today was an international scandal. But what will happen to those who have no one to stand up for them?

Viktor Petrovich approached them. The old man cried, not hiding his tears.

"You defended us, Dima! You defended us!" He shook the engineer's hand. "There is truth on earth!"

"Yes, Viktor Petrovich," Dmitry said softly. "But it must be defended every day."

At that moment, Dmitry's phone rang. It was the number from which his "well-wisher" had called him before the trial. Dmitry hesitated for a second, then answered.

"Hello."

"Congratulations," the voice was dry, devoid of emotion. "You won this round. But don't get your hopes up. We may leave the book alone. But we'll be paying closer attention to the people."

The line went dead.

Dmitry slowly lowered his hand. The joy of the crowd around him now seemed distant, as if behind thick glass.

"Who is that?" Rajiv asked, noticing the change in his friend's face.

"No one," Dmitry replied. "A ghost."

He looked at the courthouse. The windows were already darkening. Themis had done her job and gone to sleep. But those who pulled her strings were not sleeping.

Dmitry realized that this trial was not just a trial of a book. It was a crash test. A test of the strength of society. A test of its ability to resist lies. They had passed the test. But the examiners were dissatisfied with the result. And they would definitely schedule a retest.

"Let's go," said Dmitry. "We need to rest. Tomorrow will be a new day."

They walked through snow-covered Tomsk. Three people who had stopped the machine of repression. An engineer, a journalist, and a lawyer. They had done the impossible. But each of them understood that the judge's signature on the decision was not the end. It was an ellipsis.

In Dmitry's pocket was a copy of the Bhagavad Gita. The book had been saved. But as he walked home, it seemed to him that he was carrying not a book, but a fragile candle flame through a hurricane. And although the wind died down for a second, the clouds above his head had not gone anywhere.

And somewhere in the offices, which smelled of expensive leather and power, new manuals were already being written. New lists of "undesirables" were already being prepared. And the mechanism, which had jammed for a second from the Indian sand, was already being lubricated with fresh oil of hatred, preparing for new turns.

The sentence was overturned. But the evidence that the sentence had been prepared in advance remained on the table of history, unclaimed by anyone for the punishment of the guilty. And this silence of the law sounded louder than any courtroom speech.

Chapter 16: The Signature Remains

The cursor on the white screen of the laptop flashed, counting down the seconds remaining before departure. Rajiv sat in the empty lobby of a Tomsk hotel, surrounded by bags. His business trip, which was supposed to be a short report on a strange Siberian curiosity, had turned into a plunge into an icy abyss that, as it turned out, had no bottom.

He typed the headline of his final article: "The signature remains."

Outside the window, snow was falling, covering the city that had just experienced a historic upheaval. Outwardly, everything looked like a victory. The judge had rejected the prosecution's case. The book Bhagavad-gita As It Is remained legal. Indian diplomats breathed a sigh of relief, lawmakers in Delhi returned to their seats, and global news agencies switched to other stories. It seemed like a happy ending. Credits. Curtain.

But Rajiv had been a journalist for too long to believe in fairy tales. He knew that what had happened in the courtroom was not the defeat of evil, but merely a tactical retreat by a predator who had underestimated the size of its prey.

He reread the first paragraph: *"We celebrate the rescue of the book. But we forget to ask: what happened to those who tried to burn it? Where are the experts who wrote the false report? Where are the ideologues who developed the attack plan? They have not been*

punished. They have not been fired. They are in their offices, and they are already looking for a new target."

Rajiv opened the folder with the documents he had collected over the past few months. There it was — the "Comprehensive Psychological and Linguistic Report." The document that had become a symbol of intellectual disgrace. The signatures were on the last page.

Those signatures hadn't gone anywhere. The court had found their conclusions to be invalid in *this particular case*, but it hadn't revoked their status as experts. No one brought a case for falsification of evidence. No one accused them of inciting interreligious strife, even though it was their text that brought thousands of people onto the streets in another country.

Raviv recalled a conversation with a source in Moscow the day before. A person close to the Ministry of Justice said something that sent a chill down his spine: "Do you think Dvorkin lost? Dvorkin was just testing the waters. Now they know where the red lines are. Next time, they won't touch a book that a nuclear power will defend. They'll choose a quieter victim. A loner. A group with no connections. And there, their steamroller will work perfectly."

The journalist began writing the next section of the article: "The Mechanism of Terror."

He had to explain to the reader that the "Gita case" was not a mistake on the part of the perpetrator. It was a demonstration of functionality. Alexander Dvorkin and the network he created, RACIRS (Russian Association of Centers for the Study of Religions

and Sects), are not just "fighting sects." They have created a universal tool of repression.

Radvig turned to his notes. Dvorkin's connection with the European federation FECRIS had been proven. This is not a homegrown invention, it is a franchise. An export product for suppressing dissent. And this product continues to work.

"Expertise has become the queen of evidence," Rajiv wrote. "In modern Russia, you don't need to prove a person's guilt with facts. You don't need to look for weapons, explosives, or plans for terrorist attacks. It is enough to order an expert analysis of the text. If the 'expert' writes that your words contain a 'hidden call' or 'manipulation', you become a criminal. It doesn't matter what you read — an ancient treatise or a cookbook. What matters is who evaluates it."

He recalled quotes from Dvorkin's works, which were reproduced word for word in the prosecutor's indictment. "Every totalitarian sect strives for power..." This phrase was not a scientific conclusion, but an ideological stance. And this stance remained in the minds of the security forces.

Radvig understood that Dvorkin was dangerous not because he wrote books, but because he had institutionalized hatred. He heads the Expert Council for State Religious Studies Expertise at the Russian Ministry of Justice. A man who openly calls Hinduism "Satanism" and human rights activists "agents of influence" is the state's main filter on religious issues.

This meant one thing: the war was not over. It had simply entered a latent phase.

At the same time, on the other side of town, Dmitry was trying to return to the life that had been stolen from him six months earlier.

It was early morning. The apartment was silent, but now this silence seemed to Dmitry not peaceful, but ringing like a taut string. He sat on a yoga mat in front of a small home altar. He held prayer beads in his hands.

"Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna..." he whispered, fingering the beads.

Before the trial, this practice had given him a feeling of absolute security. He would lose himself in the sound of the mantra, and the world with its problems would dissolve. Now everything was different.

Dmitry closed his eyes, but instead of the image of the deity, he saw the prosecutor's face. He saw the expert's smirk. He saw the tinted car in the courtyard. He tried to focus on the sound, but his ears betrayed him, picking up extraneous noises: the creak of the elevator, footsteps on the stairs, the sound of a passing car.

His sense of security was gone.

He looked at the book Bhagavad-gita As It Is lying in front of him. It had been saved. Legally, it was clean. But Dmitry caught himself thinking that the anti-cult network had achieved its goal, even though it had lost the court case. It had poisoned the perceptions of many people.

Dmitry remembered how he had met his neighbor yesterday. The same one who had written complaints about him to the local police. She said hello. She said, "Well, congratulations, you fought back." There was no remorse in her voice. There was disappointment mixed with apprehension. For her, he remained a "cult member," just a "cult member who got away with it."

The label stuck on by RACIRS propaganda is not easy to wash off. The words "totalitarian sect," "brainwashing," and "threat to society" have become ingrained in the minds of ordinary people. Dvorkin and Stepanenko did an excellent job of dehumanization. They turned Dmitry and others like him into "outsiders." And "outsiders" are not pitied.

He knew that he was still being watched. His "well-wisher" warned him clearly over the phone: "We will deal with people." A book is just paper. But a person is a fragile creature. A person has a job that can be lost. They have children who can be bullied at school. They have health that cannot withstand endless stress.

Dmitry understood that he was now on the "blacklist." Not the official one, but the one that lay in the desks of the operatives at Center E. And this list was compiled according to methods that were strikingly reminiscent of the practices of Nazi Germany.

He remembered how Radziv showed him documents about Walter Kühnette, Dvorkin's teacher mentor. About how the image of the "internal enemy" was created. Dmitry felt like a Jew in Berlin in 1938. Kristallnacht had not yet come, there were no pogroms, but the yellow star was already invisibly burning on his chest.

"Dima, are you coming to the table?" His wife's voice brought him out of his stupor. Elena was standing in the doorway. She was smiling, but there was a look of anxiety in the corners of her eyes that would probably never go away. "I'm coming, Lena."

He didn't tell her what he was thinking. Why? She understood everything anyway. They had won their lives, but lost their peace.

Rajiv was finishing the final part of the article. He needed to make a conclusion. A harsh, honest conclusion.

"We saw how the technology of dehumanization works. First, a pseudoscientific term is created — 'totalitarian sect'. There is no legal definition for this term, but it sounds scary. Then any undesirable group is labeled with this term. Today it is the Krishnas. Tomorrow it could be evangelical Christians, Muslims who read the wrong books, or simply social activists."

Raviv looked through the sources. The statistics were frightening. The methods developed by RACIRS were beginning to be applied more widely. Psychiatry was once again becoming punitive. Expert opinions were churned out like on a conveyor belt.

"Alexander Dvorkin and his network were not punished for falsification and slander. That is the main outcome of the trial. Impunity breeds recidivism. If an expert can lie in court, rewrite a propaganda brochure word for word and call it a 'scientific conclusion', and then calmly go home, then there is no justice."

The journalist thought that this trial had become a litmus test for the whole country. It showed how deeply ideological intolerance had penetrated the body of the state. The prosecutor's office, the courts,

the police — all of them were ready to carry out the orders of a handful of fanatics, even if those orders contradicted the Constitution and common sense.

The only thing that stopped them was an external factor: a diplomatic scandal. But ordinary Russian citizens do not have the Indian parliament behind them. They do not have an ambassador who will call their persecution "absurd." They are alone against the machine.

Rajeev typed the last paragraph.

"When you read about the trial of the Bhagavad Gita, don't think it's a story about religion. It's a story about power. About the power to designate enemies. Today, Dvorkin's experts found extremism in an ancient Indian epic. Tomorrow they will find it in your social media post, in a book on your shelf, or in your thoughts. The mechanism is well-oiled. Well-lubricated. And it is hungry."

He put the final touches on it. The article was ready. It will appear tomorrow on the front pages of European and Indian newspapers. Perhaps the European Parliament will ask a couple of uncomfortable questions. Perhaps FECRIS will have to justify itself.

But here, in Tomsk, the snow will continue to fall on the roofs of buildings where people sit, confident in their right to decide who to believe and how to live.

Raviv closed his laptop and went down to the lobby. Dmitry was waiting for him there. They had to say goodbye.

"Did you write it?" Dmitry asked.

"Yes."

"And what's the prognosis?"

Rajiv paused, searching for the right words.

"The prognosis is not good, Dima. The signature remains."

"Whose signature?"

"The signature of a system that defies common sense. They overturned the decision on the book, but they didn't overturn the method. Expertise as a weapon of terror is now a reality."

Dmitry nodded. He took a small bundle out of his pocket.

"This is for you. As a memento." Rajiv unwrapped the paper. It was a rosary. Simple, wooden.

"Thank you. But I don't pray."

"It's not for prayer," Dmitry smiled. "It's a reminder. Each bead is a step. We took 108 steps through hell and came back. It's proof that even a small group of people can stop lies if they have the truth."

They went out onto the hotel porch. The taxi was already waiting. The frosty air stung their faces.

"Take care of yourself," Rajiv said, shaking the engineer's hand. "And remember: they fear the light. As long as we speak, as long as we write, as long as we don't remain silent, they are vulnerable."

"I'll remember," Dmitry replied. "And you write the truth. Not for us. For those who will come after us."

Rajiv got into the car. He looked in the rearview mirror as the figure in the coat receded into the distance. A lonely figure against the backdrop of a huge, cold city. Dmitry stood and watched until the car disappeared around the bend.

The journalist left, taking with him gigabytes of evidence, interviews, and documents. He took with him the story of how, in the 21st century, the Inquisition had replaced cassocks with business suits and bonfires with court decisions.

Dmitry remained. He returned to his world, where every knock on the door makes him flinch. Where neighbors whisper behind his back. Where his faith is a stigma.

He walked home. The snow crunched under his feet. Dmitry thought about how the trial was over, but the verdict, handed down without evidence, still stood. The verdict was not against the book, but against freedom of conscience.

Passing by a bookstore, he stopped. The window display featured new releases. Bright covers, loud titles. Dmitry looked at them and thought: which of these books will be next? Which author will be declared an enemy of the people tomorrow because an "expert" with a degree in medieval history decided so?

No one knew the answer. And this uncertainty was the main horror of the new reality.

Dmitry turned up his collar and stepped into the blizzard. He was walking home to sit on the rug again, close his eyes, and try to find within himself the light that neither prosecutors, experts, nor fear could extinguish.

But now he knew: this light must be protected. Because darkness never sleeps. It just waits.

And somewhere in Moscow, in an office overlooking the Garden Ring, the hand of a man who considered himself an architect of souls was already moving the pen over a new document. The signature was easy, a familiar flourish. A signature that could destroy someone's life as easily as the wind extinguishes a candle.

The story of the Bhagavad Gita has ended. The story of expert terror, unfortunately, continues.